

Project: NIGHTMARE

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Summary: A Covenant ship gets lost in space and eventually stumbles upon a human world close to Earth. Wolf team is sent to stop their invasion. Project NIGHTMARE has its own secrets, but there is a cost.

Project: NIGHTMARE

Project: Nightmare

****By: Benjamin Browning****

****Prologue****

Chambers of the Fallen, High Charity

Datum Honomee' was meditating in the Chamber of the Fallen to feel closer to his dead ancestors. It always calmed him down. The room was cylindrical; the walls contained closed caskets that spiraled up the chamber, they contained dead warriors who fought thousands of battles combined. A dim light hung from the ceiling glared off the deep traditional purple of the Covenant. There was a tree and a small pond in the center of the room to symbolize a continuance of life of the fallen warriors while walking in their path of the Great Journey. It makes him feel stronger and more alive. It was like his ancestors were telling him their mistakes to prevent from what killed them, from killing him. His meditation was cut short due to a Zealot walking into the room, breaking all concentration.

The Zealot's armor had a red to yellow illumination in the dark room. The Zealot announced his rank and name to Datum, so he wasn't punished for his interruption. The Zealot was Datum's brother, Field Marshall Zeon'a Honomee'. Datum outranked his slightly younger brother by one promotion. Zeon'a was a true warrior. Cold, ruthless, cunning, wild, and above all he always did whatever it took to accomplish his mission. He is the most favored Zealot by the

prophets. The Prophet of Truth particularly favored him. "Brother?" Datum said in an annoyed tone. Zeon'a responded in a relaxed tone, "My brother, I come with great news."

"Can't it wait? I'm busy," said Datum. "No. It can't," snapped Zeon'a. Datum rose in disappointment in his brother's disrespect towards their ancestors. Datum locked eyes with Zeon'a and said "What's so important that Iâ€|" before Datum could finish his sentence, Zeon'a interrupted him with a quick and scary message. "The Prophet of Truth has a special mission for us and he wishes to speak with you." Datum's eyes opened quickly in this surprise. "The Prophet of Truth?" he thought to himself. "Me? I wonder what the holy ones are going to have us do next my brother."

Datum bowed in respect to his ancestors. The two Sangheili exited the chamber. It was a puzzling trip from the Chamber of the Fallen to the private quarters of the Prophets. The two Sangheili didn't say a word to each other the entire way. Quite a bit of time has passed when they finally reached their destination. The entire walkway to the Prophet's personal rooms was flooded with Honor Guards. They are the most holy and most trusted protection of the Hierarchs. The Honor Guards stood ready to give their lives to ensure the Prophet's safety. But the Honor Guards weren't informed about the meeting with these two approaching Sangheili. The holy protectors scrambled into formation; ready to kill, ready to die for the prophets. The two Sangheili were confused about the actions of the Holy Guard.

Before things became any worse. The Prophet of Truth emerged from his room with raised arms. "Stop! I've requested their presence. Stand down," cried out by a small and delicate creature in a hovering chair. Datum and Zeon'a quickly kneeled in respect and in thanks. Truth just saved their lives. "I'm sorry for that misunderstanding. I guess the message wasn't passed on to them that I wanted to speak with you," said Truth. Datum and Zeon'a stayed kneeled with their heads bowed down. "Rise my warriors," said truth in a softer tone. Datum and Zeon'a stood up slowly. Then they proceeded to follow the prophet back into his room.

Datum and Zeon'a stood in amazement on how wonderful the Prophet's room was. They knew the Hierarchs were well taken care of, but this was far from unimaginable. It looked like what seemed to be silk sheets woven out of gold on the bed. The windows stained with various colors that depicted a scene of the Great Journey from one of the Prophet's speeches long ago. The temperature of the room was perfect, not too cold, and not too warm. Unlike the training and eating quarters the two Sangheili trained and ate in most of their lives.

Truth turned to face the two Sangheili and said "Do you know why I called you here?" Datum stood and shook his head. "I've called you here because I have a _special_ mission for you two." They both noticed that the prophet said "special" with a lot of emphases. But they ignored it for now to listen to their new orders. "Every day we're getting closer and closer to finding the home world of those defile humans. But now, we have an idea where it is." On the armrest of the prophet's chair shot up a holographic map that showed new coordinates that the Sangheili had never seen before.

"I want you two to take your men on a scouting mission, to see if our new findings are true. But first, I have to do something," Truth said

while aiming a finger at Datum. He stood nervously. "Kneel Field Master Datum Honomee'," said Truth. Datum kneeled and bowed his head. Truth said, "You have fought well and followed orders in your campaign against the humans. But in order for you to lead this mission, you must be a Ship Master. But you are not oneâ€¦" a long pause in between words. "Until now," said Truth. Datum looked up in gratitude. He thought to himself that he is now "Datum Honomee', Ship Master." Datum rose and behind him, half way between him and the window, a box opened. Truth pointed at the box, indicating that Datum should walk over there.

Datum looked inside and found brand new armor. It was stained white with markings of the Covenant showing his new rank. He equipped his armor quickly. Then he turned to face Truth. "Thank you holy one. I will not fail you. I swear it by the Gods the human world will be found and destroyed," said the new Ship Master. Truth said, "I know you won't. That's why I asked for you personally as head of this mission. Now go." Datum and Zeon's bowed, and then exited.

When the Prophet was alone in his room, he faced his window, looking at the pyramid shaped construct that stood in the center of High Charity. "With their sacrifice, we'll know soon enough where those filthy humans hide," said Truth devilishly. He began to laugh in pure madness, sick from power.

****Chapter 1****

0754 hours March 4th, 2525, Location: Classified, Planet Reach

It was in the middle of winter. Snow blanketed the mountains and the ground around Fort Hope. It was an undisclosed base. Only a handful of people knew about it. Lieutenant Commander William Kerwood was one of those select few. He is the commanding officer of Fort Hope. In his barracks, the sound of his coffee maker in the morning made his head ache. It always bugged him. But the price for his delicious coffee was worth it to him. There was a voice that appeared into his ear piece, "Good morning Lieutenant Commander Kerwood." A peaceful voice Kerwood always thought.

It was the base's AI, "Bella." Since the creation of AI's by Dr. Halsey, they were able to pick their "form." Choose what they looked like. Bella took the form of an old fashioned Nurse from the early 20th century with a blue tint. "Good morning Bella," said Kerwood. "I'm happy to inform you that there is a message for you from ONI, waiting for you in your office Commander," said Bella in a calming tone. Kerwood thought to himself what orders from ONI awaited him as he exited his room.

The walk from his barracks to his office wasn't too long. He enjoyed the bright, warming sun and fresh cool air. The Lieutenant Commander passed several soldiers on the way to his office. They all saluted quickly without error. He of course saluted back, because every since his first promotion, he always wanted to be a respectful CO (Commanding Officer). He flew up the ranks quicker than most because he was a man of honor, respect, and courage. It was near impossible to find anyone with at least two of those qualities, let alone all three.

As he approached his office, there was a man in an odd uniform standing just outside the building. It was a familiar face, someone

who he hasn't seen in years. It was Staff Sergeant Coppers of the ODSs (Orbital Drop Shock Trooper). "Good morning old friend," said the Sergeant in all black, holding his ODS helmet up against his hip. The Lieutenant Commander had a distinct smirk on his face as he said "Good morning to you too friend. You aren't going to salute me?"

The ODS and the Lieutenant Commander go way back. Fought and lead missions together. They enlisted together, old friends since they were kids. But they separated when the ODSs were mass recruiting back in 2522. Coppers held the rank of Captain before he was busted back down to a Private when he joined the ODS's uniform, standard procedure. While Kerwood continued his career with the navy and is now in charge of the fourth most classified place in human history.

The Sergeant of the ODSs stood stiff and replied "Let's call it even when I saved your ass back on Psi Serpentis." There was laughter between the two old friends. Kerwood put his hand on Coppers' shoulder and said "What brings you here?" Coppers looked into Kerwood's eyes and softly replied "I was told to report to you and await your orders after you read something. That's all I was told."

"That's strange. I have a message from ONI awaiting me in my office. Why don't you join me and we can both be brought up to speed," said the Commander. They both entered the office and saw an envelope on the desk in the center of the room. Kerwood walked over and picked it up, and as he opened it he said "take a seat anywhere."

The contents of the envelope was a data pad, one they both have never seen before, it had a peculiar look to it. The room glowed green due to the activation of data pad. Kerwood smiled because the data pad's information meant that his plans for small Spartan squad were approved. Coppers asked "What is this? Is that?" Kerwood interrupted with "If Spartans was what you were going to say next, then yes it is. I have a plan for a few of Dr. Halsey's 'kids' as she calls them. And you are going to help me train them old friend."

"Is that an order, or are you asking me as a friend?" asked Coppers. Kerwood walked away from his desk and looked out the window and replied "A little of both. Half as a favor and half as an order." Coppers answered back "If you order me, I have to. If you ask me, I don't want to be a part of anything dealing with ONI." Kerwood said "I'm sorry friend, I need your help. It's an order then."

****Chapter 2 ****

0700 hours March 10th, 2525, Anchor 9, Planet Reach's High Orbit

Spartan-021 awoke in a hospital bed, bright lights with nurses and doctors all around him. They were recording his vitals and measuring his physical alterations. He was slightly confused and he had forgotten where he was. There was tremendous pain all throughout his body. He began to move and tried to break free from whatever was holding him down. The restraints that held the Spartan were becoming loose and about to burst.

One of the nurses walked over and ran her fingers through his hair

and said "It's ok. You've been unconscious for 18 hours. All the other Spartans blacked out long before you did, you tried to stay awake during the whole procedure. You are a strong one, that's for sure."

The Spartan was worried about his brothers and sisters. He asked the nurse "Where are my brothers and sisters? Are they ok?" "Your who? Oh, I'm sorry to tell you, some of themâ€¦|didn't make it," said the nurse. The Spartan was horrified about the news he had just received. His stomach twisted and ached. Fear overwhelmed his heart, and tears flooded his eyes.

He feared the worst for his best friends. Michael, Andrew, Naomi, and Armando were all he had left; they were his only family. He freed his right arm and grabbed the nurse's upper arm, squeezing tightly, crushing the bones. She screamed in pain. He demanded in rage the names of the ones who had died during this transformation into a military monster.

Several stocky marines rushed into the room trying to hold the Spartan down. The Spartan threw many of the marines across the room, they smacked against the walls. More marines came in to aid. While a dozen men tried their hardest to contain the beast, a motherly voice came over the speakers in the room. It was Dr. Catherine Halsey's voice; she was behind a one-way window that was observing the surgical room where all of this was taking place. She knew the answer he was seeking.

In a sweet and soft voice "Albert, please calm down. You need to listen to me. Michael, Andrew, and Armando survived the procedure. But unfortunately, Naomi didn't make it. Her body rejected the augmentations and went into cardiac-arrest. We couldn't revive her in time. I'm sorry."

After hearing that Naomi didn't survive, the Spartan screamed hysterically and broke down into tears. The marines were surprised on how fast the Spartan stopped fighting back; they went from trying to hold the Spartan down, to holding him in comfort. The Spartan's screams of sorrow echoed down the halls.

****Chapter 3****

0711 hours March 10th, 2525, Anchor 9, Planet Reach's High Orbit

Lieutenant Commander Kerwood and Staff Sergeant Coppers stood behind the one-way glass next to Dr. Halsey. She took her hand off the speaker phone, and looked at Kerwood in the eyes. Kerwood knew what that stare meant. She was disgusted with him. His "New Project" killed one of her beloved, handpicked Spartans. Naomi's face couldn't escape Halsey's mind. All she could think about was her short black hair, shiny light brown eyes, and her perfect smile.

Kerwood said "I'm sorry about what happened to Spartan-065." As soon as he finished his sentence, Halsey snapped back quickly "Her name was Naomi! She's not just a number! All you ONI are just the same, cold hearted. " After a few moments of silence, Kerwood looked at Coppers, and signaled to hand her the envelope which contained his plans and orders for the surviving Spartans. She snatched it out of the Sergeant's hand and opened it.

She read the first few words on the top of the page out loud. "Project: NIGHTMARE?" she said. She skimmed the rest of the paper. Kerwood said "You know your orders. Spartan's 004, 021, 123, and 049 are to be relieved of your command and are now under my authority." "You might be taking four of my best Spartans, but the fifth one's death is on your hands," said Halsey as she removed her glasses and whipped tears from her eyes.

"The contents of my project and of this meeting are highly classified. Any word of this and I will make sureâ€¦" Halsey raised her hand and responded "Don't threaten me Lt. Commander. My life is already hell for what I've done to these children. Take care of my kids. If anything happens to them, I'll personally send you the devil."

Kerwood felt her pain and fear for her "kids." He did. He just couldn't show it. If he showed weakness, ONI would retire him on the spot. ONI had been keeping close tabs on him. Every camera and satellite were watching, and listening. This project had a lot riding on it. Failure wasn't an option for them.

Kerwood turned to face Coppers. "Round up our recruits, Sergeant. We head back home at noon," said the Lt. Commander. The Staff Sergeant saluted, shot Dr. Halsey a sympathetic look, and left the room.

****Chapter 4****

Aboard the "Light of Holy Fire," High Charity

The newly promoted Ship Master was admiring the beauty of High Charity from one of view screens of his refitted ship. The "_Light of Holy Fire_" was a standard assault vessel. But after undergoing massive reconstruction and upgrades, it is now a super carrier. One of the largest capital ships the Covenant had ever created.

Datum was alone in the bridge, for the most part. He had is back to all the unmanned stations, and sensed a presence on the bridge. Without looking he knew, and said "What news do you bring me bother?" The Zealot leader was lurking in the shadows, shocked that Datum was aware of him being present.

"You're losing your touch brother. You used to be the most silent in the clan. What's our status?" said Datum. Zeon'a felt ashamed that he wasn't able sneak up on his brother. Zeon'a replied after a long pause, "The ship is almost stocked with our needed supplies." He was very proud to report a special gift to Datum. "I am also bringing along my best, and most viscous of Zealot warriors for you brother."

"Good my brother, I thank you. We begin our journey as soon as everything and everyone is onboard," said Datum in a deep, but loud tone. When the Ship Master turned and then became surprised to find that Zeon'a had already exited in complete and utter silence. "Victory is at hand," he thought to himself.

****Chapter 5****

0830 hours March 10th, 2525, Anchor 9, Planet Reach's High

Orbit

Just after Chief Pedy Officer Mendez entered the surgical room, Albert had finally calmed down. The Chief Pedy Officer ordered all personnel to evacuate the room immediately. "Stop your tears son. Naomi was a great warrior. I'm sorry she passed away. But don't let her death be in vain. I brought someone to talk to you." said Mendez. It seemed like his speech rapidly tamed the monstrous Spartan.

A very tall and well built man entered the room. It wasn't just a man, it was a fellow Spartan. Albert was somewhat happy to see John. Spartan-117 was the official leader of the Spartans. Albert sat up and leaned over the edge of the bed. John walked in and took a knee in front of Albert. "I'm sorry to hear about Naomi. But you need to remember to never give up. Spartans never die, they're just missing in action," said John.

"Yes sir," Albert said in a very low voice. "I can't hear you Spartan?" demanded CPO Mendez. Albert yelled at the top of his lungs, "YES SIR!" CPO Mendez replied "That's more like it. John, go round up the rest, we start training tomorrow." John left the room. "We have other plans for you Albert. You'll be briefed in a different room, so get your clothes on and follow me."

They both left the room within seconds. They took a few elevators and then walked what seemed like the whole space station. The CPO stopped just before a door that was painted black. It had an eyeglass in the center of it to only let in people who were allowed. Mendez threw out an open hand, waiting for a hand shack and he said "This is where I let you go son. It's been a pleasure training you. Good luck to you for whatever they have planned for you." They shook hands, and then CPO Mendez walked away.

Albert was confused to what had just happened. The black door opened, it was dark inside. A faint voice called his name. As soon as he entered, a light had turned on. There were two men sitting at an oval shaped table. He noticed that both men wore heavily decorated uniforms; he read "Kerwood" and "Coppers" on their right shoulders. He quickly saluted after noticing the "Lieutenant Commander" and the "Staff Sergeant" insignias around their neatly ironed collars.

"At ease soldier," said the Lieutenant Commander. Albert stood at parade rest. "You're probably wondering what's going on. This is Staff Sergeant Coppers of the ODSTs and I'm Lieutenant Commander Kerwood. I have plans for a special team of Spartans. And I would like you to lead them. Can you do that soldier?" said Kerwood.

The Spartan stood there for almost a minute when he finally replied, "Sir, yes sir. It would be an honor sir." Kerwood smiled. Because no matter what the Spartan said, it was going to happen. "You get to pick your team of four counting yourself. Who will they be?" said the Staff Sergeant. Albert, without hesitation replied, "Michael, Andrew, and Armando."

Kerwood smiled so big all his teeth were showing. "Perfect," he thought. "Your team will be assembled and sent to begin training tomorrow. You all will be known as WOLF TEAM," said the Lt. Commander.

1240 hours April 3rd, 2525, Fort Hope, Planet Reach

It had been almost a month since Wolf Team was reassigned to harder, more intense training. Bella took care of the Spartan's academics. Coppers coordinated, planned, and designed all the obstacle courses and training sessions. Each one was more difficult than the last. Kerwood was present ever so often to supervise for paperwork, records, and to keep politics off their backs.

The Staff Sergeant stood on a platform that was overseeing the obstacle course his Spartans had just finished. Coppers had the four Spartans awake for almost two weeks straight, preparing them, for their first mission. Each course was more difficult than the last. He also had them wear 250 lbs. in gear while running 25 miles in a pressurized hanger every twelve hours. So that extra weight felt even heavier.

The Spartans were exhausted from their new, sometimes unorthodox exercises. Their muscles ached and they were out of breath. Wolf Team was standing hunched over, grabbing their knees in fatigue, in little a huddle. "This is rough, harder than our other training," said Armando. The rest nodded in agreement while panting. But their break was cut short.

"Spartans, Line up!" yelled Coppers. They stood side by side at attention. Coppers walked from the high platform to where the Spartans stood in a matter of seconds. They were surprised that someone other than a Spartan could move so quickly. Coppers watched the massive killing machines that he had been training for a month stand before him. He said "I have a gift for you gentlemen, for all your hard work." All four Spartans made eye contact with each other.

"Follow me," said the Sergeant with a grin. The Sergeant and Spartans made their way to the center building of Fort Hope. Coppers slid his I.D. card and punched in his password. Bella's voice came from the security panel saying "Access granted." They heard sounds of the locking mechanisms twist and turn. The bulky door slid open and inside the automatic lighting system activated. "What do you think it is?" Andrew asked Michael. "I don't know," he answered. Armando walked in between the two and said "I bet half my supper that it's another obstacle course." "You're on," whispered other the two Spartans. They entered the mysterious building.

The Staff Sergeant stopped at a panel that was waist high. He had his hand on a lever. Before he pulled it, he said "I am proud to take your military careers to the next step." Just after he pulled it, four glass cases which contained different suits of armor descended down from the ceiling. "This is what you'll be wearing when you go out into battle," said Sergeant Coppers. The Spartans were amazed from the sight of the armor.

The glass case to the far left that had "_Andrew-004_" printed on the top, held a dark green suite. It held the "AF Pilot" helmet; it had a massive gold visor that seemed to give immense visibility. Able to endure the harshest punishments any pilot goes through. Andrew was the best pilot the military had ever seen before. On his first flying lesson, he took a pelican beyond its limits and caused a flight instructor of 30 years to retire. He was the aviator of the

group.

The next case read "_Michael-123_." It had a teal colored suite with a beak-like "Scout" helmet. This particular armor was designed for long range warfare. It had a fiber optic lens along the trim of the helmet that could zoom in onto a target 5 miles away. One time Michael shot the center of a target with a SRS99C-SC AM 50cal. sniper rifle, 4 ½ miles away, with only its ironsights. He was the sniper of the group.

The third glass case had "_Armando-049_." This orange colored suite had a "Tac-Med" helmet. There was an attachment on the left side of the helmet that slid down into the holder's view and projected a full medical history of a patient. At the age of 13, Armando successfully performed open heart and open brain surgery on the same patient with only a combat knife, a sewing needle and thread, and a pen. He was the psycho medic of the group.

The last case to the far right read "_Albert-021_." This medium-charcoal colored suite had a "Commando" helmet. The body was fitted with CQC (Close Quarters Combat) platted armor that could absorb tremendous amounts of abuse. Albert was 12 years old when he walked into an empty locker room while five jealous marines followed him in and locked the door right behind them. When the MP's arrived moments later due to noise complaints, they found two marine's heads smashed into the same locker, one knocked unconscious lying along a wall, another thrown half way through a window leading outside, and the last one was screaming while almost being beaten to death by the young boy. He is the best at CQC of the group.

But each suite of armor had one thing in common, one thing that bonded them together. On all the left shoulder plates of the suites was stained with a wolf howling at the moon. It was the insignia for Wolf Team. That is their mark, their symbol, their way of life. Hunting like a pack of wolfs, always covering each other's backs.

"At 0400 hrs tomorrow, you guys will be deployed behind enemy lines to recover a box of upmost importance. You have a week to accomplish your mission and you have to find your own way back and consider these 'gifts' as early birthday presents," said the grey haired Sergeant. "It's an insurrectionist controlled planet Spartans" Bella announced. The Spartans rushed to their assigned glass cases to try on their new armor. Lieutenant Commander Kerwood stood in the shadows, watching his Spartans being fitted into their bulky armor. "They'll give that betraying bastard a good scare," he said under his breath.

****Chapter 7****

0502 hours April 4th, 2525, Scyllion, Charydbis IX

Simons was an insurrectionist who enjoyed going out on patrol with his comrades at night. He wasn't at rock bottom of the food chain in rank, but he wasn't at the top either. He had a lot of responsibilities, and protecting a safe in his boss's warehouse was one of them. They were out patrolling in the back behind the warehouse.

The pack of six insurrectionist were about to pass a tall stack of

bags filled with powdered concrete when they heard chatter over their radios about someone hot-wiring and stealing a pelican. Distracted by the reports, they didn't notice that one of Simons' oldest friends, Dane, had disappeared. They called his name wondering if there would be an answer back.

Simons noticed a very large shadowy figure run by them. He hesitated to shoot it. The group of innies' turned to look in the direction where they heard a metal-on-metal sound. As soon as Simons turned to give orders to his squad, he watched another friend get knocked down and dragged away by the mysterious dark figure.

Before Simons could give the "fire" order, someone among the group started shooting randomly into the night. "One of you follow me, the other two stay here," yelled Simons. His voice competed with the noise of the gunfire. Simons and his soldier ran back to the warehouse to guard the precious safe. They reached the warehouse safely and went inside through the back door.

When they rounded the corner to a hallway that led to the room where the safe resided, the power went out and the emergency lights flickered on. Simons heard screams from his men and crackling from several different types of gunfire. When they got to the end of the hall, Simons flashed a light into the room and found their safe had been torched open and whatever was inside wasn't there anymore. He swore under his breath.

Simons and the other soldier sprinted back the way they came from to join their comrades in the fight. Just before they reached the doorway that led outside, he couldn't hear the crackle from a single gun anymore and feared the worst. The soldier that followed Simons inside fell to the ground. He turned to help him, thinking he fell over his own feet, but found a large knife sticking out from the back his head. He was horrified by the scene and ran outside to escape.

His assumptions about the two men he ordered to stay behind were true. They were lying in pools of their own blood. Now he was the last to stand. He felt a presence behind him. As he turned, he saw an extremely tall and dark, heavily armored figure materialize from the shadows. There was a faint voice that came from inside the figure's gold visor helmet. Simons heard "Albert, can I have the last one? I want to break my record." The armored figure returned to the shadows and replied "Sure. Go for it."

Simons felt blood drip down his body to his feet. As he looked down and found a huge hole in the chest, he fell to his knees. Several seconds later he heard the sound delay from a distinct 50cal. He felt the rattle of engines as a Pelican approached. It flew overhead, and then started to descend towards his position. He watched the figure leave the shadows and joined what looked like more of those shadowy armored figures in the Pelican. When it ascended with incredible force, it threw Simons back several feet. He was flat on his back; he saw the Pelican blend into the night sky. Simons watched as the bright stars became darker and darker with each passing second.

****Chapter 8****

Aboard the _Light of Holy Fire_, Slipstream

Agamemnon was one of the few Jiralhanae aboard the Light of Holy Fire. The super carrier was dark; with the vast majority of the crew resting for the long journey ahead. He felt he didn't get enough food when the entire ship feasted before going into slipspace. So he sneaked out of his pack's den to break into one of many pantries in the Light of Holy Fire and get more. When he got to the door that led to the pantry, he discovered the door was slightly open. The Jiralhanae rushed in, plowing the door wide open.

The Brute had already eaten more than half the food when he caught a familiar scent. The second he turned around he felt something grab his arms and legs, pick him up, and hold him down onto a table. Agamemnon couldn't see whatever was restraining him. "Your kind is new to the Covenant. So easily tricked to fall into an obvious trap, so careless. You've proven yourselves unworthy and distrusting," said a Sangheili as it uncloaked itself from the mists.

The Jiralhanae wasn't ashamed for what he did, but ashamed for getting caught red-handed. Two more Elites revealed themselves as they were holding him down. He noticed these weren't just any Sangheili, they were Zealots. Agamemnon started to panic and fear for his life. "Wait! Don't kill me!" said the Jiralhanae while urinating on himself.

The biggest Zealot, who stood in front of the doorway, moved in closer to the Brute. The scared Jiralhanae recognized the massive Elite that approached him; it was Zeon'a, one of the most feared Sangheili and leader of the Zealots. The Zealot leader pulled an extremely sharp blade from underneath his chest plate.

Zeon'a held the blade up to Agamemnon's throat, pressing hard, then said "Why do you steal from your Sangheili Commanders?" Agamemnon squealed in fright. "Do you know the punishment for stealing?" said the Zealot holding his arms. "Nâ€|no, Great One" whimpered the Brute. "Its death," hissed Zeon'a.

Agamemnon begged "Pleaâ€|pleaâ€|please don't kill me Great One!" "The Covenant doesn't show pity on the weak and unfaithful," said Zeon'a in a deep growl, while grabbing the fur from the back of the Brute's head. The great Zealot leader swiftly pulled something from his forearm sleeve. It was a large hilt that had a curvature similar to the shape of an "M."

A bright blue light illuminated the pantry. The Jiralhanae screamed in pain. Blood ran down the ape-like body of the Brute, some of it simmering on the plasma powered sword. Zeon'a had forced his energy sword straight through the heart of Agamemnon.

The Zealot pushed it deeper and twisted the handle, and the screaming stopped. Everything became silent. Zeon'a said "What a disgrace. The Great Journey doesn't have room for any cowards or thieves." The Zealots reactivated their cloaks and exited the room.

****Chapter 9****

0600 hours April 9th, 2525, Fort Hope, Planet Reach

Lieutenant Commander Kerwood awoke to someone knocking at the door. He got up slowly and answered it. It was his Staff Sergeant from the

ODST's who he had personally requested his transfer to Fort Hope. Coppershad more grey hair than Kerwood, even though he was a few years younger than the Lieutenant Commander. The Sergeant had more scars than the Commander did, due to the differences in their professions.

"Sir, Wolf Team is inbound," said Coppers. The Lieutenant Commander stood in confusion. He asked his Sergeant "Isn't their E.T.A. in two more days?" "Yeahâ€¦it was" answered Coppers. "How far out?" asked Kerwood as he rushed to put on his uniform.

The Lieutenant Commander and his Staff Sergeant made their way from the officer's barracks to their office in minutes. As they entered the office they noticed a small wooden box on the center of Kerwood's desk.

The Spartans were off to the side, opposite from the window, in the darkest part of the room. They stood at attention. Their commanding officers stood in the doorway in amazement. "They've gotten better" the two CO's thought to themselves.

"Nicely done boys, at ease" said Kerwood as he walked over to his desk and picked up the box. The Spartans stood in curiosity, anxious to see what was inside. The Sergeant closed the door behind him, and then he walked to the window to shut the blinds. The Lieutenant Commander partially unbuttoned his uniform and took a silver key off the necklace that held his dog tags.

Wolf Team watched Kerwood unlock the wooden box with his key. Wondering why he had a key to unlock something that belonged to an insurrectionist. The Lt. Commander opened the center drawer to his desk and pulled out a silver tin lighter with the UNSC insignia on it. "Do you want one Coppers?" asked Kerwood. "Sure, thank you Sir" replied Coppers.

The Spartans saw their Commander hand their Sergeant a cigar from the box. "Cigars?" said Wolf Team to their commanding officers. "Our mission was all for a box of smokes, Sir?" asked Albert. "Not just any cigars son, Cuban cigars from Earth. Very expensive and with a lot of flavor," replied Kerwood. Coppers didn't smoke his; he slid it into the inner pocket of his ODS's BDU.

"Take today off for some much needed R&R. Eat and sleep well," Kerwood told his Spartans. "No thank Sir, we don't need to, nor want to" replied Wolf Team simultaneously. Kerwood and Coppers stared at each other, proud of what they just heard. "I'm happy to hear that, but that's an order" said the Lieutenant Commander. The Spartans saluted, and then exited the building.

"They've already written and turned in their field reports" said Coppers as he walked away from the window towards Kerwood's desk. "They're perfect. Now it's time to make their old training look like child's play. I have a lot more planned for them. Project Nightmare is now shifting into full gear" replied Kerwood as he lit his cigar.

****Chapter 10****

1800 hours April 9th, 2525, Mess Hall, Fort Hope, Planet Reach

The Spartans haven't eaten in two days; the last time they ate was just before their first mission five days ago. They were practicing for whatever may happen in the field. All four entered in a single file line, they headed straight for a buffet in the center of the cafeteria.

"This is weird," said Andrew. "Since when did they put in a buffet?" asked Michael. "I have no idea, but it looks so good," replied Albert. "We can have seconds right?" asked Armando.

There was enough food on the buffet cart for an entire battalion. After each Spartan acquired several plates of food each, they all sat at closest table. They noticed an abnormal taste in certain foods and looked at each other in suspicion. But ignored it and continued eating.

The Spartans managed to consume all the food within a matter of minutes. Wolf Team left the mess hall satisfied and headed for their barracks for rest.

****Chapter 11****

1836 hours April 9th, 2525, Fort Hope, Planet Reach

At the back of the mess hall, in the kitchen, Staff Sergeant Coppers questioned the cooks who prepared the chafarons for the Spartans. "Did you put the whole bottle in their food?" demanded the Staff Sergeant who held up a black bottle that held the ONI's insignia. "Yes sir, we did," replied the head chef.

Coppers asked "How well did you hide it? Did they notice?" "Sir, no sir," replied the cooks. "They ate all the food we prepared. In my 40 years of cooking for the military I've never seen four soldiers eat that much. Plus they were kids!" said the head chef. "Good. What happened here is classified. Head over to building B for debriefing." Coppers watched the cooks leave the room.

He stood there for a few minutes. Wondering if what he and Kerwood were doing to these kids was right. "It's for the greater-good," he thought. He's been telling himself that for a long time now. It helped him sleep at night.

****Chapter 12****

1000 hours April 23th, 2525, Fort Hope, Planet Reach

It's been two weeks since the Spartans' first mission on the insurrectionist's planet Charybdis IX. Their training became more accelerated and horrifying news of Harvest being attacked by an alien race had come in from ONI. If any information came from ONI, it was top secret.

Along with highly classified information, ONI also dropped off a shipment of technology from the new alien foes. A cargo box that had "_**ONI**_" on the sides contained plasma powered weapons were essential to the Spartans' training. Sergeant Coppers felt they needed to be ready for this new threat.

"Ok, you all must run this course under **5:00** minutes," the Staff Sergeant announced to his Team made eye contact with each other while

lining up at a "Start" line like in a race. "We'll make it in less than **5**minutes Sir," said Albert. "I don't think you can. My run this morning was **4:30, **I've given you an extra 30 seconds because I don't think you can beat me," gloated Sergeant Coppers.

The Spartans took that as an insult. They all thrived off challenges, hoping one day they'd find one they couldn't beat. "I take that back Sir, we'll make in at **4:29," **said Albert. They all laughed. The Staff Sergeant replied to his Spartan's squad leader "I hope so. If you don't, there will be no food, no water, and no sleep for a week."

Wolf Team stood tense behind a red line, waiting for their Sergeant to give them the "go." Coppers held up a stopwatch and said "Time starts now boys." Their hard metal boots were clenched to the ground so hard, when they sprinted off; there were boot-sized holes in the concrete floor where the Spartans stood.

The Spartans went through the course with so much speed and precision, they were flawless. Targets popped up randomly, some fired back with live rounds. They destroyed them before the mindless drones could make a direct hit. It was like they studied and practiced this obstacle course all their lives. But something about this course was different, different in a way that it showed the new alien threat was the challenge they were looking for.

Michael and Andrew both noticed that Armando was falling behind too often and could hardly keep up with the rest of the team. "Albert," radioed Michael on a private channel. "What is it?" answered Albert. Robby replied "Armando isn't keeping with us. He's starting to fall behind." "Alright, the next door we clear stay in the shadows by the corners," replied the squad leader. "Affirmative," replied both Michael and Andrew.

As soon as they ran through a doorway of an enormous room, Michael and Andrew quickly turned and disappeared into the dark. But Albert and Armando kept running. Armando wondered what was going on. "Why did Andrew and Michael stay behind?" asked Armando over a private channel he had opened up with Albert.

Sergeant Coppers was in a room that monitored the "maze" he had built for his special soldiers. "How do you think they'll do?" asked Bella. He feared what he had to do next, what it may do. Coppers turned a key on keyboard and typed in "EXERCISE/25." "My hopes for them are the same as yours" replied Coppers. Bella and Sergeant Coppers watched as little doors and parts of the floor open up and the real training began.

In the large room the Spartans had entered. Sentry turrets had risen from the floor, walls, and ceiling. But they didn't fire the regular 13.5mmx100 FMJ SAP ammunition the Spartans were used to having fired at with. White hot plasma began to collect at the barrels of the turrets, and fired.

Plasma hit the floor just a few inches from of Albert and Andrew. It burned a hole straight through the 3 foot thick metal slab above dirt that the base stood on. "What the hell! What did that thing fire at us?" asked Armando. "I don't want to find out. Let's move!" replied Albert.

Armando and Albert were barely outmaneuvering the turrets plasma fire. One shot flew over head into a wall, almost hitting them. Some plasma splashed onto Ben's shoulder plate. "Ah! That burns!" yelled Albert. Armando automatically went to his aid by treating his squad leader's wounds. "You have 2nd, 3rd, and 4th degree burns. I can see the bone," reported Armando.

While Armando was busy attending to Albert's wounds, there was an opening in the floor behind them. A sentry gun arose. Unaware to its existence, it aimed, and fired. Albert yelled "Incoming!" They scattered. Plasma shot across the room almost instantly and hit one of the Spartans in the back.

Armando fell to the floor, screaming in pain. Albert was dumb struck by what just happened. He watched his friend lay on the floor burned and bleeding to death. "ARMANDO!" shouted Albert as he returned fire onto the turret which took down his soldier.

Albert threw his M45 Tactical Shotgun and fell to his knees at Armando's side, trying to stop the bleeding. Albert picked up Armando and held him in his lap. Andrew and Michael returned from the darkness, standing over Armando and Albert.

"Oh my god," whispered Andrew. "Damn it!" shouted Albert while he injected Armando with biofoam. "The bleeding isn't stoppingâ€¦MEDIC!" Ben screamed as he removed Armando's helmet and his own. "I'm lue lung shot. My BP is dropping," Armando told Albert as he gurgled on his own blood. "How do I fix you?" demanded Albert. The sounds of Armando gasping for air and choking on his blood caused Robby and Andrew look away.

Sergeant Coppers was alarmed of what he just witnessed. He typed "EMERGENCY-Med-Vac_0942" which activated the emergency medical procedures. He watched medics rush onto the training course. They had a hard time putting Spartan-049 on a gurney to take him to the infirmary.

Albert leaned over his knees as he punched the ground, over and over. "Damn it! Why? Why didn't he move quickly enough?" said Ben as tears ran down his face, dripping onto his bloody hands. Andrew put his hand onto Albert's undamaged shoulder and said "It's ok. It wasn't your fault."

Wolf Team watched as one of their own was hauled away. Hoping he would be ok, and rejoin the team as soon as possible.

****Chapter 13****

1004 hours April 23rd, 2525, Fort Hope, Planet Reach

The Staff sergeant picked up a phone and pressed autodial. It rang four times before the Lieutenant Commander answered. "Sir" said Coppers. "What happened? Bella notified me an emergency med-vac was ordered." The Staff Sergeant reported "An incident happened with Spartan-049 Armando."

"Where is he now?" asked Kerwood. "He's being rushed to Infirmary-003, Sec. 2," answered Coppers. "Meet me there in 5," ordered Kerwood. The Staff Sergeant hung up the phone.

His chin started to quiver as he removed his beret and started to sob. Coppers had grown to like these boys. He saw them as the sons he never had. He feared he may lose one, from his own obstacle course. To him it felt like he pulled the trigger himself. He looked at his stopwatch, it read ****4:28****.

****Chapter 14****

2042 hours April 23rd, 2525, Fort Hope, Planet Reach

The waiting room at Infirmary-003 Sec. 2 was filled with people who cared for the injured Spartan. Lt. Commander Kerwood, Staff Sergeant Coppers, and the rest of Wolf Team all awaited news on their hurt member of the family. Armando has been in surgery the majority of the day.

The door that had "ICU" above it opened. It was the surgical doctor. He ran his hand over his shaved head as he walked over to the Lieutenant Commander. They both whispered to each other and had an argument only they could hear. Everyone was wondering what they were saying. But they were more worried if Armando is ok.

The doctor saluted the Lieutenant Commander and left the room. "So? What's his status?" asked the Sergeant. "The doctors and nurses flashed cloned him to replace his damaged organs and bones. But it wasn't enough; he doesn't have much time left. Apparently he had other internal problems from Phase Two," said Kerwood. "Phase two?" Wolf Team thought to themselves.

They all moved to a room where Armando was at. The sound of an EKG machine masked any possible silence. Everyone stood over Armando's bed, watching him as he opened his eyes. "Hâ€|hey guys," mumbled the severely injured Spartan. "How do you feel?" asked Andrew in a soft voice.

"Like I got hit by a car," smiled Armando. They chuckled. "Don't you mean a train? If a car hit your big ass, it would've split in half and you would be ok," said Michael. Everyone began to laugh harder. Albert moved closer to Armando, grabbing his hand and saying "I'm sorry buddy. It's my fault you're here. I should be in your spot."

The EKG machine started to beep slower and less frequent. "He's crashing!" said Bella as she appeared on a nearby projector. Warning alarms began to sound off. Everyone began to worry. Nurses rushed in to revive the dying of the nurses stopped what she was doing and shook her head indicating the Spartan had passed.

Albert punched a hole in the wall straight through to the next room. His Sergeant walked over and grabbed his shoulder and said "Hey, calm down soldier."

"You said earlier something about 'Phase Two.' What's that?" asked Albert. The Lt. Commander cleared his throat for what he was about to say. "Phase Two is the second stage of your augmentations. It's a chemical that increases the effects of the augmentations you received a month and a half ago by five fold. We slipped it into your food and water yesterday, in the buffet. All of your bodies accepted the new change. But Armando's body rejected it. Like Naomi did with the first stage."

The Spartan quickly turned around and shoved away his Sergeant; he flew a few feet and hit the ground. Albert rushed over to the Lt. Commander so fast he was a blur, grabbed him by the arms, lifted him off the floor, and pinned him to the wall and shouted "You killed him!" Michael and Andrew rushed to help the Lt. Commander.

The other two Spartans had a hard time holding back their squad leader. Kerwood landed on the floor, "Why? Why didn't you warn us?" said the enraged monster yelling at him. "Because we've been training you to expect the unexpected. Become stronger, smarter, and faster. To be the best you can be. You Spartans are our last hope. Especially now that we're up against this new threat called the Covenant."

Albert stopped fighting back and said "The least you could've done was 'slip' us a warning," then left the room. Michael and Andrew stood in confusion. They didn't know whether to help their CO or follow their squad leader, their brother.

"You guys are going to win this war against those alien bastards," said Kerwood as he stared at the two remaining Spartans.

****Chapter 15****

800 hours October 25th, 2530, Fort Hope, Planet Reach

The Spartans and twelve marines just got on a pelican to rendezvous with HELIX-9 in the Silent Hills of Reach. Both 1st Lieutenant Bishop and 2nd Lieutenant Price were fresh out of officer's school and in charge of this mission. They were to assist in capturing insurrectionists who attacked a small base of the UNSC in the thickest forest of Reach. There was a huge difference between the two officers.

Bishop served in combat and earned his ranks, highly decorated. He was a man of pride, honor, and valor; a true soldier. Price never served or even held a weapon until now. He always got his way and always made things difficult for everyone else. Lieutenant Price paced back and forth while saying "Listen up marines. We have the UNSC's newest science project accompanying us on this mission. Take a good look men; this is what will replace us soon," as he pointed at the green armored Spartan.

The Spartans sat alone at one side of the pelican, near the large aft door. Albert sat in his chair, leaned over, fiddling with something in his hands as he laughed to himself. It was silver, metal, and shinny. Price ran over to Albert and said "You better follow my orders. If you don't I'll shoot you myself." Albert looked up and retorted "You must be the professional asshole I was warned about." The whole cabin erupted in laughter. Price grew angry. He looked at Albert's shinny object and snatched it out of his hands.

"What's this?_ Armando €" S-049?_ Why do you have someone else's Dog tags? That's an offence, and I'm keeping them," said Price. Albert unbuckled himself, grabbed the Lieutenant's throat with one hand and slammed him into the wall, and drew his M6C/SOCOM magnum pistol, pressing it on the 2nd Lieutenant's forehead. He moved so fast it was all a blur. Price gasped for air, chocking on his tongue. All the marines except Lieutenant Bishop stood, drew their weapons, and

fixated them at the black armored Spartan.

Michael and Andrew both quickly rose, aiming their weapons at the marines. "I count ten. I can get five of them in one shot, maybe six depending on the ricochet," said Michael as he looked down the iron sights of his sniper rifle. Andrew replied, "I can get four before they can get a shot off," as he switched the safety off of his MA5B assault rifle. The marines shook in their boots due to what the Spartans just said aloud.

Bishop chuckled to himself as he got up slowly. He passed through the group of marines, and walked by Michael and Andrew. Bishop put one hand on Albert's shoulder and said, "That's enough son. Please let him go." The massive Spartan let go and the Lieutenant fell, he fell to the floor sucking in air. Bishop picked up the dog tags from Price's hand and gave them back to Albert.

Bishop knew why Albert had another soldier's Dog Tags. "How long has he been gone?" asked Bishop. The tall Spartans looked at the tags and replied in a sad tone, "Five years, sir." The 1st Lieutenant pulled a keychain of over a dozen Dog Tags from his leg pocket. Albert saw that he knew what it was like to lose a soldier, a friend, a brother.

Price got to his feet and said in a raspy voice, "You'll be court marshaled when we get back! Arrest them!" Bishop stood in front of the Spartans, protecting them. "No! Stand down." Price looked at him and said, "How dare you!" "They did nothing wrong," said Bishop. The marines backed off, and one by one the soldiers slowly went back to their seats.

When the Spartans finally took their seats, Bishop, instead of sitting near the cockpit like he always did, he sat with the Spartans. "We're coming into a landing half a click from the rendezvous. Too many trees to land any closer," said the pilot over everyone's COMs channel. "That's B.S., I would've gotten us right on top of our rendezvous point, not half a click away," said Andrew.

When the pelican landed, the back door of the giant bird opened and marines poured out quickly. Bishop barked, "Set up a perimeter, keep it tight. Spartans, I want you to scout ahead." All three Spartans nodded and said, "Yes sir!" Bishop watched as the tall and heavily armored soldiers disappear into the brush of the trees.

****Chapter 16****

Aboard the "Light of Holy Fire," Unknown

"Where are we?" demanded Fleet Master Datum. He became impatient due to no one answering him. Datum got up from his Commander's chair that sat in the center of the bridge, drawing all attention to it because of its thrown-like appearance.

He made his way to the Sangheili that was in charge of his ship's navigations. "Tell me, where are we?" asked the Fleet Master. "I'm not sure Fleet Master." Datum said raising his voice "We've made several jumps and we don't know where we are? The Prophet's told us to go here!"

There was a long silence just before a Zealot emerged from the shadows and said "What if they were wrong my brother?" Datum quickly turned to see who had the audacity to speak of such heresy. It was Zeon'a. "By the gods Brother, saying such things can get you killed," said Datum.

"Then why are we lost brother?" asked Zeon'a. Datum couldn't find the words to answer him. Because he started to believe what Zeon'a had said. The crew on the bridge stared at Datum questioningly, wondering what was going to happen next. "Prepare for another jump. We're going to find those retched humans," Datum said in a deeper tone.

The bridge erupted in excitement. Everyone growled in agreement. The _Light of Holy Fire_ made a random jump, vanishing into the infinite beyond of space.

****Chapter 17****

1756 hours December 16th, 2540, UNSC HQ, Planet Pallas
Athena

Corporal Walton was at his work station when he saw two of the largest blips he had ever seen appear on radar. "Uhmâ€¦Ma'am?" said Walton. Sergeant Major Escalera was the shift-CO (Commanding Officer) in Communications. "Yes, Corporal?" answered the Sergeant Major. "Can you come look at this please? I think this thing is busted," asked the Corporal. "Forgot how to do your job Corporal?" said Escalera as she walked over to Walton's work station.

As Sergeant Major Escalera made her way to the radar section on the third floor of the Communications building at the UNSC's HQ on Pallas Athena, she noticed something was wrong. The computer estimated the larger of the two objects was 72 miles long by 13 miles wide and 250,000 miles out and closing. Escalera thought it was on the fritz, so she reset the computer.

When the computer came back online the object was still there, but closer this time. It was 10 minutes till it hit orbit. She was speechless. "Ma'am? What is it?" asked the Corporal. The Sergeant Major quickly turned to grab her tac-pad and pulled up the base's A.I. "Arthur" to contact her CO.

Before Arthur answered she said, "It's the Covenant, these ships are big." The A.I. took the form of a young boy in overalls; he tried to mirror the appearance of the 20th century character from "Denis the Menace."

Arthur appeared next to the radar work station saying "Good evening Sergeant Major Escalera" in a sweet voice. "Get me General North now!" yelled Sergeant Major Escalera. "Patching you through ma'am" Arthur said while giggling and putting his hand in his pockets.

"This better be important Sergeant Major," said General North in an annoyed tone. "Sir, the Covenant is here!" said the Sergeant Major. "God save us all. You now the standard protocols, we're at Def-Con 4" said the General.

The sound of alarms flooded all around HQ. The intruding ship had just entered orbit.

****Chapter 18****

Aboard the "Light of Holy Fire," Planet Pallas Athena's High Orbit

"Ship Master! We found a human planet!" said the Sangheili at navigations. "Good" thought The Ship Master. "Is it their home planet? What do they call it, Earth?" said Datum. "Not sure Ship Master,

but they've already detected us. They seem to be scrambling for defensive actions," said the Sangheili at communications.

Datum stood, raised his fist and said, "No matter what the humans do, they will fall by our hands. Prepare for a global assault." Datum turned to find his brother. Zeon'a wasn't on the bridge. Datum left the bridge and walked to his brother's private quarters.

When Datum reached Zeon'a's room, he noticed the room was open. Datum thought to himself "Who would be brave enough to steal from one of the most feared Sangheili warriors who had ever lived. Let alone the brother of the Fleet Master too." He laughed under his breath as he entered the room.

"Brother?" said Datum, wondering if Zeon'a was even there. An odd sound screeched behind Datum, one he had never heard before. As he turned and saw nothing, the lights in the room went out. Datum grabbed his energy sword and lit the holy blade. The room illuminated with a bright blue light.

Something grabbed Datum from behind and held him in a choke-hold. A sharp blade was pressed against his throat. "Sneaked up on you this time brother," whispered a voice into Datum's ear from behind. "Zeon'a?" asked Datum. "Yes brother" said Zeon'a as he released his brother from the choke-hold. "Are you mad?" yelled Datum.

"I still am the most silent of the clan brother," said Zeon'a as he holstered his small dagger. "When you're done playing foolish games, I want you to lead the first strike against the humans," said The Fleet Master. The Zealot leader stood there for a few seconds before he said, "Yes brother. By the will of the prophets and of the gods." Then the Zealot vanished by his cloaking.

Datum stood there relieved it wasn't an assassin; instead it was his brother who wanted to prove his skills. The lights in the room came back on. Datum thought, "The humans don't have any chance against him. The battle for this planet may have already been won." The Fleet Master holstered his energy sword and left the room.

****Chapter 19****

1823 hours December 16th, 2540, Fort Hope, Planet Reach

Vice Admiral Kerwood and Chief Warrant Officer Coppers were the first to receive the news about Pallas Athena at Fort Hope. Kerwood and Coppers were promoted due to their successful Spartan team, always crippling the Covenant. They stood in the Vice Admiral's office, planning a strike against the Covenant invasion. "You only want to send them Sir?" asked the newly promoted Chief Warrant Officer.

The Vice Admiral turned to look his Chief Warrant Officer in the eyes and said, "Why not? They've always completed their missions at 110% with ultimate speed, precision, and perfection. Always came back alive and well." "Only Wolf Team? With no reinforcements? Why are you turning this into a solo-op.?" asked Coppers.

Kerwood leaned forward in his chair and said, "Because if they can't stop the Covenant invasion on Pallas Athena, no one can. No matter how many people we send." Kerwood started rubbing his temples. "Sir, since we're sending them in alone, how are we going to insert them? Where is their LZ?" asked the concerned Warrant Officer.

"The SOEIVs (Single Occupant Exoatmospheric Insertion Vehicle and A.K.A. "Egg" for short) are our best bet. We're taking my old ship, the Liberty Bell," said the Admiral pulled a bottle of whiskey from a drawer of his desk. The Warrant Officer slammed his fist into the desk as the Admiral poured for two glasses and said, "That's suicide! This isn't going to work!" "This is what they do," quickly replied Kerwood in a deep voice.

As the Admiral reached for one of the glasses, the Warrant Officer grabbed both glasses and chugged them down. Coppers whipped his mouth and said, "They'll accomplish their mission. It's what they do." The Chief Warrant Officer did a lazy salute and then left.

Kerwood sat deep into his chair staring at his old friend close the door. He wondered what might happen at Pallas Athena. The beautiful, yet large Pallas Athena wasn't just any UNSC controlled world; it was basically in Earth's backyard. Kerwood was worried because if they found Pallas Athena, then Earth might be next.

But the order he gave to his Chief Warrant Officer wasn't his own. The Vice Admiral was informed of the Covenant super carrier the second it came out of slip stream directly from ONI. He was curious on how they knew so quickly.

****Chapter 20****

1834 hours December 16th, 2540, Fort Hope, Planet Reach

When Chief Warrant Officer Coppers entered the barracks of his Spartans, he saw Andrew hanging upside down on a rope tied to the ceiling doing sit-ups while holding 150 lbs. weights, Michael sat on his bunk cleaning and adding new attachments to his deadly sniper, and Albert was sharpening his kukri knife on his forearm armor plate.

Coppers was amused by how his Spartans were always prepared, ready, and waiting for their next mission. They seemed normal when they were out in the field, doing what they do best. "Officer on deck!" yelled Albert as he stood up at attention. His Spartans rose to salute with so much speed it was almost a blur.

"At ease gentlemen" said the Chief Warrant Officer as he whipped a tear from his eye. This might be one of the last times he'd see them. "The Covenant has found Pallas Athena. It is one of the closest inner colony planets to Earth. Brass wants to send you straight in to counter-strike the invasion" said Coppers. "About time" said Andrew. Robby nodded in agreement and said, "I was getting bored just sitting

around. Our last mission was yesterday."

Coppers knew they would be excited about this mission. "Gear up, we leave in one hour. You are going to be inserted by SOEIVs from the war ship _'Liberty Bell,'_ alone. Then rendezvous with the 1st Armored Division and you'll be under the command of General North. There will be a global wide evacuation for civilians," said the Chief Warrant Officer.

Wolf Team turned to each other in a triangle-shaped huddle. "Customer called and said they have roaches," said Michael as he put a full magazine of Mk30 armor piercing rounds into SRS99C - SC AM sniper rifle. "Are we going to use poison or our boots?" asked Andrew in a sarcastic tone. "Well the customers won't be home to supervise us. So we can do whatever we want," said Albert with a smirk as he slid his knife into its sheath.

****Chapter 21****

1940 hours December 16th, 2540, Onboard _Liberty Bell_

The Spartan's briefing on the bridge with Chief Warrant Officer Coppers and Vice Admiral Kerwood was short. Not because their commanding officers didn't have much to say, but because the Spartans didn't want to talk or listen, they wanted to fight. They only asked three questions.

They all hovered over a holographic table which projected the events on Pallas Athena. Michael asked, "How much of the planet is already in Covenant control?" "1/3" answered Coppers. Andrew asked, "How many survivors made it out alive?" "None" answered Coppers. Albert asked, "When do we get there?" "Now" answered the Vice Admiral.

"We're coming out of slip stream now," reported the co-pilot. "Understood. You'll be inserted by the SOEIVs" said the Admiral as he turned to face his Spartans and saw they were no longer standing in the room.

The Spartans immediately exited the bridge as soon as they heard their Admiral say that they were there, just above the fight. They eagerly waited to get to work.

After Kerwood noticed his Spartans had left he walked over to the main window of the bridge. It overlooked the entire planet. Coppers turned to look at Kerwood and said, "How long do you think they'll last?" Kerwood knew the odds were against them.

"They'll do what they always do, their job," said Kerwood. He knew it was a lie and so did Coppers. But the two commanding officers had hope for their Spartans.

****Chapter 22****

1950 hours December 16th, 2540, Aboard _Palinouros_

The Spartans waited in their insertion pods. They all performed a ritual of their own before going into battle. Albert tested his seat's restraints over and over. Once he was satisfied with his seatbelts, he played the "drop" in his head. He hated failure and hesitation.

Michael disassembled and then reassembled his sniper rifle. Cleaning and polishing it every time. He would time himself so he could beat his previous time. Robby was eager to use his new 15 x 114mm Anti-material incendiary rounds he synthesized himself.

Andrew was staring out the tiny plexiglass window, thinking why he wasn't flying the team down planet-side. He ran the numbers in his head and came up with better odds on taking a pelican down and risking being shot out of the sky than being ejected from the ship straight into the heat of the destruction.

A voice came over the speakers of the Spartan's helmets, it was the copilot, he said, "SOEIV pod drop in 30 seconds." There was a loud explosion that forced the pods out into space.

Within seconds the pods caught fire in the atmosphere of Pallas Athena. It didn't take long for the SOEIVs to reach the ground.

****Chapter 23****

1957 hours December 16th, 2540, Forest of Ignis, Pallas Athena

The roar of the M12 Warthog's engine made it difficult for Sergeant Major Escalera to communicate with General North over the radio in her helmet. The General sent the Sergeant Major to retrieve the Spartan reinforcements. She sat in the passenger seat, exhausted from talking so loud and repeating herself to the general.

"Have you made contact Sergeant Major?" bellowed General North in Sergeant Major Escalera's earpiece. "No Sir. They're still inbound," yelled Escalera as she looked through her binoculars and seeing the fiery insertions pods shooting across the night sky. The General replied "Bring back those Spartans ASAP Sergeant." "Incoming!" interrupted by the marine operating the chain-gun in the back of the warthog.

A large green blob shot from the brush near the tree line of the forest, exploding in front of the warthog. The vehicle turned, flipped on its side and slid for several yards. The warthog came to a stop by slamming into a large boulder; and by that time all the marines were thrown out except for one.

The two marines that were thrown out of the vehicle quickly rose and returned fire while slightly disoriented. Their bullets reflected off of a blue giant that appeared from the bushes. It resembled a medieval knight; a large shield for an arm, and a glowing green cannon for the other. The "Hunter" as they're called, walked towards the overturned warthog. The two standing marines ran for cover behind a large boulder as they heard their fellow marine's cries for help.

Lance Corporal Walton sat upside down in his seat in the overturned warthog. The seatbelt was jammed and melted to his metal-alloy chest plate armor from the explosion. He struggled to free himself from his new metal prison. Walton yelled for help when he started to hear heavy footsteps walk towards his position.

Sergeant Major Escalera and Sergeant Houston watched as the Hunter

lifted its large foot and began to stop on the warthog. "Ammo check!" yelled the Sergeant Major. Sergeant Houston checked his pockets and said, "Last mag." Both of them swore out loud. "Any Grenades?" asked Houston. Escalera nodded "no" in disappointment. "Damn it! How are we going to save Walton?" asked Sergeant Houston.

The Sergeant Major radioed in, "HQ come in. This is Sergeant Major Escalera. We are pinned down on the eastern side of The Forest of Ignis. We need reinforcements. I repeat, we are pinned down are in need of reinforcements." There was only static that answered her calls for help. "What now? He doesn't have much time!" screamed Houston.

The Sergeant Major looked over the boulder they were hiding behind to see what shape the warthog was in and see if Walton was still alive. All she could see was only one Hunter; she didn't see the second one. The two marines learned in boot camp that they are always in pairs.

Suddenly she felt Houston push away her as a massive shield-like arm came crashing down and slit the rock in half. The Sergeant Major ended up a few meters into the forest. Dust and pieces of the boulder flew through the air and landed onto Escalera. A large piece landed on her leg, restricting her from moving. The crushing weight caused her to scream in pain.

The large metal creature walked and stood next to her, hovering over her. She leaned to the side to see if Houston got away safely. But she found Sergeant Houston turned over on his back. The Sergeant Major couldn't see if he was unconscious or dead. The Hunter gave a loud roar as it lifted its destructive arm, indicating it was going to pummel her. But it interrupted by an Elite's bark. The Hunter stood down and stepped aside.

The Elite walked from behind the Hunter and moved towards her, slowly. It wore peculiar armor she had never seen before or heard about. She watched as the Hunter grabbed Houston's leg and dragged him away. The Elite kicked her AR out of her reach and started to lean over her. A blue energy sword materialized in the Elites hands. "Come on! Do it!" roared Escalera.

When the Elite raised its sword, Escalera watched as a shadowy figure ran up the back of the yellow-orange tinted Elite like it was stairs, stabbed a large but curved knife into its throat, and twisted it for the instant kill. The tall Elite fell to the ground, drowning on its own blood. In the dim moon light that broke through the tree branches, she saw a silhouette of a soldier appear and pull the knife out, blood poured from the wound on the neck of the Elite.

"Are you hurt ma'am?" asked the dark figure as it lifted the rocks crushing the Sergeant Major's leg. She whipped the sweat and blood of her face to see an extremely tall suite of armor. Escalera hesitated, "Yes," she answered.

The armored giant picked her up and walked her towards her warthog. They walked by Sergeant Houston's body, he had two small plasma burns on the center of his chest 4 inches from each other indicating he was stabbed in the heart by an energy sword. She involuntarily started to cry of the death of her best friend.

"I'm Albert, Spartan 021, Senior Chief Petty Officer, Squad leader of WOLF TEAM," said the man behind the golden colored visor who held her. When they got close to the warthog, Escalera looked up and saw several dead Elites, Jackals, and two Hunters. She heard screeching noises and turned to see the warthog was almost flattened. Two other Spartans stood on top of it, bending metal with their bare hands, prying it open.

They pulled out a marine, it was Lance Corporal Walton. His BDUs were bloody, but he was still alive. The Spartan laid the Sergeant Major next to the warthog, as did the teal colored Spartan with the Lance Corporal. "This is Michael, Spartan 123, Petty Officer First Class," said the squad leader as he pointed at his sniper. He pointed at his pilot and said, "And this is Andrew, Spartan 004, Petty Officer Second Class."

"You're the Spartans they sent? Only three?" shouted the Sergeant Major in confusion. "Yes ma'am!" shouted Wolf Team as they all gave her a crisp salute. "The general made it sound like there was a platoon of you guys coming in," said Escalera.

Albert smiled behind his helmet and proudly said, "Wolf Team is Special Forces." The Sergeant Major and Lance Corporal looked at each other and said, "Special Forces?" They both looked dumbstruck. "I thought the Spartans were Special Forces," said Escalera. There was a long pause before Albert replied with, "Ma'am, we're the Special Forces of Special Forces."

There was a loud hiss over the radio followed by, "This is Bravo-743, come in?" "This is Senior Chief Petty Officer Albert, we have two wounded and one dead, six total," answered the head Spartan. "I'm inbound to your position sir. Five minutes out," said the pilot flying General North's personal pelican.

Albert walked over and picked up the Sergeant Major as the pelican appeared over the trees and started to descend. The back door to the pelican opened slowly, General North was there to greet the Spartans. "Sir," said the black armored Spartan as he walked in passing the General and with his team following him. "Welcome aboard son, I'm glad to see you."

Before the pelican took off back to base, Andrew walked up to the North and asked, "Sir, permission to pilot your bird? I'm aware of you twin turbo with direct fuel injector upgrades. I want to take it for a spin." The General thought to himself that the planet is facing total destruction and yet this Spartan is cheery and excited to fly a pelican. Maybe there is hope after all.

A few seconds passed and the General answered, "Granted soldier." Andrew quickly said, "Thank you sir!" then turned and ran for the cockpit. Michael and Albert looked at each other and chuckled as they overheard Andrew saying "I'm flying this bird, go sit in the back" to the pilot already flying it.

Albert sat down and buckled while saying over the Wolf Team's private channel, "No back flips or quark screwing." "Got it sir," replied Andrew. The pelican lifted off the ground with so much force, the engines screaming with power. "Take us home son," said North as he closed the back door.

****Chapter 24****

2123 hours December 17th, 2540, UNSC HQ, Pallas Athena

General North and 1st Lieutenant Snow stood in front of a holographic projection of the planet Pallas Athena. This was their last hope to save the planet, their last stand. All three Spartans were in attendance adding suggestions. "There are only two ships, one of them being the biggest we'd ever seen. We don't know why there is only two, but they brought enough for a standard invasion," said the General in what seemed like disappointment. He was offended by the thought of his planet being taken over by only two ships.

General Franklin J. North was born and raised on Pallas Athena, and was one of its finest. North was very tall, but not as tall as Dr. Halsey's Spartans. He had salt and pepper mustache and crew cut hair. At first glance you would see a dominant and assertive man, when the occasion called for it, but for the most part he was a giant teddy bear. "Did they actually find out where this place is? Maybe they already know where Earth is," said Andrew as he pointed to the not so distant blue planet on the map. "Could that be why they're here?" asked Michael. "That would be a good plan. Knock out the neighboring planets, destroy all possible reinforcements that could aid in defending our home base," said Snow.

Albert got up from the chair in which he was sitting in, and walked over the window to look at the massive Covenant ship in atmosphere. Arthur appeared next to him giggling and said, "Hey, what'cha lookin' at?" "Nothing, just seeing this war being over soon when my team and I go to work," said the Spartan. Arthur looked confused. He calculated the odds of success for the Spartans and he kept coming up with 0.9% for success.

Arthur thought to himself, how could someone have so much confidence and optimism when there is no possible chance? "The answer you're looking for is the fighting will of a human for survival," said Albert as he walked away from the window, back towards his team. Arthur was mortified on how the Spartan knew what he was thought and calculated. He ignored his basic functions and responsibility for a few moments to figure it out. Arthur wanted to know, he must find out to satisfy his curiosity.

The only door to the control room opened and a marine walked in. His BDUs were very dirty. He looked like he was fighting the war all by himself. Albert recognized this man from somewhere, but he couldn't remember from where.

"ONI just sent in some intel about our guests. Their trajectories show they found us on a random jump and absolutely have no contact back home," said the marine as he pulled an envelope from his vest pocket. "Ah, good. Boys I want you meet Captain" all three Spartans stood immediately and saluted, "Bishop. He'll be helping you in the field," said General North.

The last time they saw Bishop, they all were on a recon mission in the Silent Hills of Reach and he was a 1st Lieutenant. "It's good to see you boys again," said Captain Bishop. Albert wasn't surprised that he's a captain, a suitable title for the man. "You guys know that Bishop was offered a spot as Lieutenant General at my side? But turned it down," said North. Everyone could tell he was proud of

Bishop. "Sir you know me, I'd rather be fighting than planning," said Bishop.

North pulled up the biggest city on Pallas Athena, it's capital. "This is Shadow Moses. There is an abandoned airport in the west of the city. We plan to strap a pelican with a nuclear warhead. It's a 'Trinity' warhead with 20 kilotons of yield, and pure atomic destruction. They used some in the mid-20th century. We want Andrew to fly it in, Michael to cover the backs of the workers in the airport, and Albert to aid on the front lines nearby. Bishop will be your CO," said North.

The General turned to face the Spartans. "Any questions?" asked North. All three Spartans raised their hands. "Yes Albert," said Bishop. "When do we leave?" asked the eager Spartan, the other two lowered their hands because they wanted to say the same thing. "Now," said the General.

The Spartans quickly exited the room, anxious to fight. The room seemed quiet, until 1st Lt. Snow came from behind and grabbed Captain Bishop by the shoulder. He asked, "Do you think they can save us?" Bishop turned and looked him in the eyes and said, "I've seen those three defend against a hundred thousand Covenantâ€¦and came back only complaining that it wasn't challenging enough." Snow became horrified due to what he had just heard, but at the same time felt comfort in Bishop's words.

****Chapter 25****

0210 hours December 17th, 2540, Shadow Moses, Pallas Athena

There was a full moon out. The pelican flew silently across the night sky, which was littered with stars. The Wolves were on the hunt. They were drawing closer to Lucifer's Gate. "We're five minutes out," said Captain Bishop over everyone's radio. As Albert rose swiftly to his feet and rushed towards the back door, "How did you know what I was processing Albert?" came over his earpiece. It was Arthur. "Cause I was thinking the same thing," he answered. Arthur wasn't happy with the answer he had received. But it would have to do for now.

"Let's finish this quick, I hear Coppers has a new course for us when we go back home," said Andrew as he pushed his shoulder into Michael's. Michael turned and said, "I bet I'll kill more of them than you." "That's not fair; I have to fly a pelican. How am I going to kill anything?" asked Andrew. "I'll take you on that bet. What are the wagers?" asked Albert. "Winner gets the two losers' months pay, plus gets that antique pistol that Coppers is selling," said Michael. "Agreed," said Andrew. "I'm in too," responded Albert.

The red emergency lights began to flash. The heavily armored belly of the pelican opened, he noticed the pelican was hovering just a few feet from the ground. The black armored Spartan turned, looking at his Captain in confusion. "Sir?" said Albert. "We're running late. You're gonna have to jump," said Bishop. Albert nodded, and then faced the open door. "Jump on my mark, _3â€¦2â€¦1â€¦_GO!" yelled the Captain.

The Spartan leaped out, hitting the ground rolling. Once Albert stopped tumbling across the grassy field he fell in, he looked up and saw a street sign. It read "Lucifer's Gate â€" 2 miles." He gathered

himself, brushing the clumps of dirt and grass off of his dark colored armor. Albert pulled up his compass on his HUD and looked for north, north-east. He unslung his M45 shotgun and sprinted off in the distance.

Both Michael and Andrew watched as their brother dissolved into the darkness of the night. "Good hunting brother," they whispered to each other under their breath. Bishop looked at the Spartans, admiring them. "What's wrong boys?" asked Bishop, even though he knew the answer. "It's nothing sir," answered Andrew. "You boys ever been separated during a mission?" asked Bishop. "No," answered Michael.

Bishop fathomed what they felt for their brother. "He'll be ok," said Captain Bishop. Michael looked at him astonished, and said, "I know he'll be ok sir. We're a team, always together, never alone." "Captain Bishop, We're approaching the airport," said the pilot, interrupting over the pelican's speakers. The Captain replied, "Understood." The pelican quickly descended then touched down on the airport's landing strip. It made a 180 degree turn to head back to central control.

The pelican came to a sudden stop and the back door immediately opened. Marines poured out, unloading equipment and supplies from the pelican. Captain Bishop and the Spartans were last the exit. "Andrew, the pelican we flew in is the one you're going to take up to the Covenant and deliver our little welcome gift," said Bishop.

"Yes sir!" shouted Andrew. As Andrew left to assist the marines fit the pelican with the nuke, Bishop turned to Michael and said, "Michael, see that hotel across the street? I want you to take two marines and cover our asses." Michael hated the idea of taking the soldiers with him. He always worked better alone. They'll slow me down, break my concentration he thought.

Michael unhappily said, "Sir Yes sir." He walked away from his Captain to go pick his "help" he was ordered to take. "Captain," giggled Arthur in Bishop's earpiece, "the nuke has been successfully armed and almost done being attached to the pelican." Bishop popped a quick smile. "Finally, when can take back our world," whispered the Captain.

****Chapter 26****

0314 hours December 17th, 2540, Shadow Moses Airport, Pallas
Athena

The cold winter morning made it difficult for everyone except for the Spartans. Their suits automatically adjusted to the temperature to help them be more efficient. Michael walked over to two marines that just finished unloading a couple hundred pounds of ammunition from the pelicans.

Michael was against the idea of bringing help that weren't his brothers, and he defiantly didn't like that he had to trust someone he didn't know that lacked the same skills like his. But orders were orders. As soon as he stopped to stare, he noticed their name tags saying "Corporal Siloe," he was tall and lean, and "Private First Class Grady," he was short but muscular. One of the two marines noticed the bulky Spartan stand before them.

"Sir!" shouted the closest marine as he saluted. Michael felt a little uneasy. The Spartan preferred being quiet, so he always tried to avoid any conversation with people he didn't need to talk to. "Captain said you two are with me," said Michael. The two marines looked at each other in horror. The two have seen action before, but nothing compared to the rumors about the Spartan's kind of "action." Good news is they're paired up with a so called legendary Spartan.

The tallest marine said, "Sir, my name isâ€¦" Michael raised his hand and interrupted with, "I don't care. Just get you stuff and follow me." Siloe was confused on why his NCO was parsimonious as he watched him walk away.

The two marines rushed to pack their things and find their NCO. They eventually caught up with the Spartan. Following close, the two marines didn't know what to expect or what the plan was. "Sir?" asked the Corporal. The Spartan continued to advance across the air field. "What's the plan Sir? Where are we going?" asked the Private. Michael began to become annoyed from all the chatter. He paused, and turned to face the Corporal. "We're going to that building in the East, to cover everyone's back. If we fail, everyone dies," said the Spartan.

Michael turned and continued towards their destination. Siloe and Grady glanced at each other, now knowing what the plan was. Surviving is what Michael mostly thought of during a mission, but he never was without his brothers, so now his survival was all he thought about.

All three of them made it across the air field and closed in on the building. They were sneaking around to enter through the back. Michael radioed in to Arthur on his COMLink, "Arthur, is there any Covenant in the building?" A sputtering noise flooded through his helmet's speakers. A moment later, Arthur, giggled and responded with, "Scans show there is movement inside the structure at your position. But I can't tell if it's Covenant or not. Please be careful sir." As Arthur closed the COM channel, Michael heard children's laughter.

Michael signaled the marines to go around to the front. They took their time to walk along the wall. The Spartan moved alongside the wall to look for a latter or a fire escape to climb. As he looked up, Michael smiled and was pleased at what he saw.

Corporal Siloe came to a stop just before rounding the last corner of the building to the entrance; he checked his rifle's ammo counter, "36." He sighed in relief, "It's full" he thought. Siloe adjusted his Trijicon ACOG sighting scope from 5x zoom to 2x.

Private First Class Grady moved in from behind and tapped his Corporal on the shoulder, indicating that he was ready. They moved swiftly around the corner and met the entrance. It had to have been at least sixty stories tall. They gazed at the enormous building. The revolving doorway was blocked by a large metal sign.

The two marines quickly moved towards the doorway and removed the sign from blocking their way in. As they tossed it aside, Siloe read "James David Trucking Inc." in bold letters above the door. They

entered through the rusted revolving glass door. Taking their time to make sure they didn't make a sound.

They crept through the lobby, scanning for hostiles. "Look, an elevator. Check to see if it works," ordered Siloe. Grady pushed the "up" button. He sighed, "Nothing. Let's look in the hallway." As they continued down the hall they noticed an odd door.

"It says 'Emergency Stairways,' but why does it require a code and an ID card?" asked Grady. Siloe wondered it as well, "Maybe they only wanted their employees to get out during a fire or something," he said. As they lined up at the door, Grady pulled out a black box that had wires of many colors hanging from it. Grady was a computer fanatic and could crack the code on any device. He connected the device to the panel on the door and went straight to work. Typing, thinking, and hacking. The sound of clicking and clacking of buttons being pressed echoed down the hall.

A little bit of time has passed since Grady began to hack the door's security panel. Siloe began to become impatient. He grunted, "How much longer?" Grady turned and answered, "Not much longer." Suddenly, the door was violently kicked open. Grady was shocked over what just happened. "Sorry, but you were taking too long. I had to improvise," said Siloe as he chuckled with a huge grin on his face.

Grady put away his homemade device and followed Siloe into the stack of stairs they had to climb to regroup with their team leader. Siloe turned and looked at his short friend after reading, "Flight 1 out 57" on the wall and said, "What floor were we supposed to meet him on?" Grady replied, "He never said. Let's raise him on the COM." Siloe nodded, "We can't risk that. We don't know if there is any Covenant inside. If we do, they'll track the signals and find him and us."

"Well, what do we do?" asked Grady. "Up," replied Siloe. The two marines started sprinting up the stairs, one by one, each step a little more fatiguing than the last. As they reached a part in the staircase that read, "Flight 23 of 57," the temperature of the building began to rise. Sweat dripping down their faces.

The sound of concrete splitting snuck up on Grady as he slipped and fell through the middle of the staircase. Dust shot up into the air, making it difficult to see or breathe. When the air finally cleared, Siloe noticed Grady was hanging in midair. "Grady! You ok?" Grady looked up and saw a teal and black armored arm extending from the wall next to him.

"Please tell me I'm not going to be carrying you all the way?" asked Michael. "No Sir. Thank you." The stalwart Spartan pulled the 180 lbs. marine up and into the hole in the wall he had made with one arm. Siloe was standing on the remaining stairs; he hopped through the hole to join them.

"How did you get up here so quickly Sir?" asked Grady. Michael took a while to reply. "The fire escape. You guys were panting so hard I heard you two from the other side of this place. You're lucky there isn't any Covenant in here." The two marines looked at each knowing what could've happened.

"Arthur?" inquired Michael, "Where is the best possible place to set

up?" There was only silence this time on the other end. "Arthur?" The Spartan checked his signal strength when the A.I. answered his call. "I'm sorry Sir, I was needed elsewhere. The front lines are getting closer and closer to home by the second. Head back through to the 23rd floor, look for the room called 'Safe Haven' and set up there. Good luck Sir."

Michael didn't hear laughter at the end of that transmission. They made their way to the staircase, stepping over the hole and walked to the door. The sign on the door, "Floor 23 - Distribution," reflected in Michael's visor. He grabbed the door handle, and slowly opening it. They all heard gunfire and explosions. Walking down the hallway, guns raised, quickly glancing in each room for movement. At the end of the hall, the last door had a plaque engraved in gold "Safe Haven."

When they opened the door, bright flashes of light flooded the walls and ceiling, dancing in unison with the noises that created them from outside. One of the walls was made of glass. While gazing at the various colors of light, Michael set down his huge sniper rifle and began to feel his stomach twist. The city of Shadow Moses was on fire. Michael raised the Captain on the radio, "Sir, we're in position." "Go to work son," replied Bishop in an exhausted deep voice.

****Chapter 27****

Aboard the _Light of Holy Fire, _Atmosphere of Pallas Athena

Every last Sangheili aboard the bridge were swarming all around, from station to station. Orders and commands were pasted down from High Command, safe in the ship, to the soldier fighting on the front lines. Datum was busy organizing a plan with his Majors, when a disturbing message came back from the battle field.

The Sangheili at the communications station was the first to receive the devastating news. He quickly got up from his seat and made his way to the holographic table where his commanders were coordinating their ideas on where to insert their forces. "The humans are putting up a small fight. But we'll have the planet very soon," said a Major in red armor. "Then why are we getting reports on tremendous casualties? Front lines getting thinner and losing a lot of ground? They're fighting back, and we're losing. We need to stop holding back," argued the second Major.

Datum crossed his arms, composing himself from his annoying officers that stood before him, "Why kill your enemy when you're guaranteed to win? There isn't any fun in that Major." Datum stopped himself from saying more because he saw a fellow Sangheili materialize in his peripherals kneeling. He recognized this Minor; the blue armored Sangheili was in charge of communication of the ships.

"Yes, what is it?" barked one of the Majors. The Minor stayed knelt, shaking in fear for his life. He knew others have been killed over delivering bad news. "Spit it out!" yelled the other Major. Datum raised a hand, "Calm down. What is it?" "Fleet Master, I bring news from the front lines." "Good. I bet its Zeon'a having too much fun." "Fleet Master, he's dead."

The air became cold, almost lifeless. Datum stayed frozen, hesitating

to react to the news of his brother's death. Anger and sadness consumed him. He slammed both his fists into the table, "How did he die?" he growled. "He was murdered, by a human in black armor."

Datum charged the messenger of his brother's death, grabbing him by his throat, squeezing tight. Gasping for air, the Minor Sangheili still managed to gather the air to ask for orders. Datum released him from his grip. "Send them all," Datum said in a deep growl, "Send everyone and kill every last human!"

****Chapter 28****

0320 hours December 17th, 2540, Liberty Bell, in orbit of Pallas Athena

Each passing light in the walkway from the mess hall to the bridge seemed endless to Warrant Officer Coppers. He appeared soulless, the thought of a war going on and underneath his feet and he couldn't join them broke him. But he knew something was wrong.

The sight of Pallas Athena being engulfed with fire and death was on everyone's view screens aboard the Liberty Bell. The crew was frightened over what they had just seen. The main door to the bridge opened. As Coppers entered, he saw Kerwood standing by the center window with his hands behind his back.

Coppers was starting to become outraged. He used to be a soldier, that's what he liked, and was what he did best. But now, he is a deck jockey. Coppers wanted to join the fight. The idea of standing by, watching soldiers die under his command while he was safe in orbit was the last straw.

"Admiral?" asked the Warrant Officer. "Yes old friend, what is it?" replied Kerwood. "Permission to leave the ship sir?" Kerwood turned to face Coppers, "Where to?" "I'm not going to lie, I want to go down and fight." "Why? What for?" Coppers took a step closer to the Admiral.

"I want to fight." The Admiral wasn't surprised by his Warrant Officer's request; he turned back to the window and looked in the empty void of space. "Noâ€¦" the Admiral said in a sad manner, "I want you up here with me." "William, I recommend you reconsider. They're starting to get overrunâ€¦"

"No! You're staying up here and that's an order. I feel for your concern for them, but you'll just be wasting your life and time." Coppers made a fist and yelled, "You never cared for them! I trained them, I made the obstacle courses, and I was always there for them! You weren't! I cared for them like sons, and you didn't."

Kerwood turned to look Coppers in the eyes to tell him the truth, but as soon as he turned, he was struck down by a hard blow to the face. His nose was broken and he was bleeding from the lower lip. The bridge erupted in shock and awe from what just happened.

The Admiral stayed on the floor, whipping the blood from face with a white sleeve of his naval uniform. "I do care for those boys, I always have. But I was away from all the time because I had to do paperwork, meetings, and presentations to keep this project up and

running. I've kept it alive."

"I'm sorry old friend, but I'm going to go down there and going to help. Something you had forgotten all about." Coppers threw his Warrant Officer's bars on the floor at Kerwood's feet. The Admiral looked at the metal insignia next to his boot for a moment, then looked up at Coppers and saw him replace his rank with his old Staff Sergeant bars. The Admiral watched his friend of forty-five years exit the bridge.

After demoting himself, Coppers made his way to the armory of the ship. Changing from the officer's uniform, to his old ODSI BDU's. He grabbed a BR55 rifle and a suppressed M7 submachine gun, along with several magazines and grenades.

When he left the armory, he walked by an injured ODSI standing in the doorway of the infirmary and he came to stop. The ODSI had bandages wrapped around his head and had his right arm blown off. The two made eye contact. Coppers recognized who he was. He is Gunnery Sergeant Harrison of the ODSIs.

Only one of Harrison's eyes wasn't covered by the bandage, it was bloodshot, straining to focus on Coppers. He noticed that Coppers is wearing his old rank he had when they had fought alongside each other long ago. The Gunnery Sergeant lifted his left arm, struggling to salute Coppers. "Welcome back," said Harrison and smiled.

Coppers saluted back, "Thank you. It feels good to be back." "Good hunting sir. It's bad down there." "I will, you rest and relax," said Coppers as he started to continue towards his destination. Coppers began to feel alive again. He entered the Hanger and walked to the operator in charge. "I'm taking an 'egg.' Go set it up."

"Aye 'aye sir!" shouted the operator. Coppers stepped to the side of an SOEIV and pressed the green "Active" button and pulled a lever that release a locking mechanism in which lowered it from the wall it laid against. It twisted and turned as it got closer to Coppers. The hatch opened, he entered it quickly.

As the hatch closed, the operators voice came through the pods speaks, "Sir, the Admiral is on standby, patching him through." "I'm terribly sorry for everything my friend. I hope you can forgive me Harold." Coppers ignored the apology, but Kerwood knew he would, but he had to say what was on his mind to his best friend for years.

The steal belly of the _Liberty Bell _slowly opened; the SOEIV spiraled down into a chamber. It took Coppers awhile to buckle all five safety straps. The operator said over the hanger's speakers, "Firing in 3ö1ö" The insertion pod shot out of the ship like an arrow from a bow.

The force for the pod breaking through the mesosphere of Pallas Athena began to take a toll on the already old Staff Sergeant. Even though the "egg" was covered in flames, inside was a cool 80 degrees Fahrenheit thanks to the thick steal plating and foam padding. He had finally broken through the smoke infected clouds when he saw the world on fire at 26,000 ft. from the center window.

He shook his head, "Stay in the shadows," he whispered to himself. That's what he always drilled into his Spartan trainees' minds,

making it key for their survival. He hasn't fired a gun in years. He didn't have to because of his promotion five years ago. "Aim for center mass," he kept reminding himself.

The SOEIV crashed in an empty lot between two builds in the outskirts of Shadow Moses. He heard gun fire and tank shells being fired from nearby. He kicked the door open and had his M7 machine pistol drawn. Across the street, he spotted 4 marines and 2 local cops lined up at the corner of a liquor store. A M808B tank or "Scorpion," rolled in from his left and fired a M512 shell down the street, it deafened Coppers for a moment. After the shot from the Scorpion, he saw the group of marines and cops round the corner and advance down the street to his right.

He ran to the corner of the building to his right. Quickly taking a peak, he saw a massive battle going on in the city. Coppers rushed to join in the fight.

****Chapter 29****

0325 hours December 17th, 2540, Shadow Moses Airport, outskirts of Shadow Moses, Pallas Athena

The blinking lights from buttons and switches reflected onto Spartan's visor as the Pelican's engines roared. The naval pilot that sat next to him in the cockpit saw that, and was spooked by it. Andrew turned to look at his copilot, wondering why he was staring. "Ready?" asked the Spartan. His copilot hesitated, "Yes sir." Silence controlled the cockpit for several awkward seconds. Andrew engaged first, "Alright, let's run a check. Thrusters and fuel?" "Green and full, sir." "Armament?" "70mm rounds 5,000, 4 sidewinder missiles, and 2 flares."

"And a nuke with a yield of 20 kilotons strapped to our asses, don't forget that one," chuckled Andrew. His copilot was too frightened to speak. "Sir, this Pelican isn't technically equipped with the right upgrades to haul this extra weight. So be careful," giggled Arthur. The Pelican started to lift off the airfield vertically; it struggled to do so because of the extra weight from third passenger, the atomic bomb.

They almost had a full view of the valley that Shadow Moses sat in the middle of. There was terrible turbulence when they penetrated the thick dark clouds that hovered above the big city. Andrew heard a beep when a bright yellow light flashed from the left side of the controls. As he pressed it, a proud voice came through the radio. "Sir, this is Senior Airman Fisher of the 'Devil Dogs.' General North sent us to escort you."

A Falcon fighter jet appeared in the window to Andrew's left. Andrew's helmet recognized the pilot as Fisher, they exchanged a wave, and then he sped up and took point. Suddenly, the Pelican was in the middle of a circle formation of Falcons. The six "Devil Dogs" shot out of the clouds and into the clear sky with tremendous speed. While Andrew piloted the pelican sluggishly through the hazy billow of clouds that masked the sky. He was itching to fly alongside them. Fast, precise, and flawless.

They drew closer to their target by each passing second. The Pelican's radar picked up numerous signatures advancing from the same

ship they aim to destroy. "Hostiles! One o'clock! Evasive maneuvers, attack pattern Alpha-7!" barked Andrew, warning the others. "They outnumber

us, three to one. Don't get any boo boos!" cried Arthur.

The ASF-47 Falcon had no problem dodging any fire or turning on a dime. But the D77-TC Pelican doesn't have the speed or agility the Falcons possessed, and in addition the extra weight made it even more difficult to evade the oncoming threats. "I count one team of twenty containing Banshees and Seraph Fighters. Not in standard formation," reported Fisher.

From a distance, the dog fight between Covenant and UNSC appeared as fireworks. The sight of Archer missiles detonated in bright yellows, lightning bolts of plasma splashing onto armor in sparkling blues, and aircrafts from both sides exploding in vivid reds and oranges, all which illuminated the sky. The battle raged on for hours, the Devil Dogs seemed victorious for the most part.

The Covenant was getting desperate; they went from shooting, to being kamikazes. The Falcon's numbers began to fade. A Seraph fighter locked on to the Pelican and headed straight for it. Andrew watched as a Falcon flew overhead and collides head on with the Seraph threat. Fisher's name indicator disappeared. The Devil Dogs had to do whatever was necessary to keep the package safe.

Andrew knew what he had to do. No one is dying in vein, he thought. The Pelican was only 400 yards away and closing in. There was a loud bang and the Pelican started to shake violently. "What was that?" yelled Andrew. His copilot checked the many meters and gauges displayed in front of them. "The right tail engine has failed and we're losing oil pressure in the left one."

They both notice and felt the pelican decrease in speed, and begin to fall out of the air. The cockpit was taken over by loud alarms and flashing red lights. Smoke began to fill the pour through the vents, replacing the oxygen. Andrew was safe because his helmet had filters, but the copilot did have a one. A Banshee did a fly by, shooting the nose of the pelican, making it spiral towards the ground.

Andrew was trying to regain control when he heard his copilot scream in agony. He took hits to the chest and legs, the smell of burnt flesh filled the cockpit. The high temperatures from the heat of the plasma burns melted him to his seat. Andrew instinctively went to aid his wounds. "Sir—" he coughed up blood, "—you need to go. Now! Go!" Andrew didn't want to argue with a man's dying wish. So he unstrapped himself and walked into the cargo bay where the a-bomb was placed. Andrew reached the back door of his bird, he flipped a switch. The exit ramp opened, he noticed the engines where ablaze.

Several Banshees swarmed all around the falling pelican like insects around a light bulb, nearly scraping on each pass. Andrew waited patiently, timing the speed and movement of everything. He quickly leaped out, grabbing onto a wing of a Banshee. As the banshee flew back to the large ship in which it came from, Andrew watched the a-bomb aboard the pelican detonate in midair.

The Spartan looked up and forced his fist into the side of the

cockpit, prying it open. He grabbed what would seem to be an ankle, and pulled the Elite out and hopped in.

****Chapter 30****

0503 hours December 17th, 2540, Center of Shadow Moses, Pallas
Athena

Death flooded the streets, destruction dominated the cities, and war consumed the world. Dawn wasn't too far away. There was a mushroom cloud in the distance, smoke and debris filled the air. The sky was red; the air was thick and gamboge.

The battle for Shadow Moses was scattered throughout the massive city. Banshees controlled the air, tanks controlled the streets, and soldiers controlled the buildings. The sounds of gunfire and tank shells echoed through the streets, bouncing from wall to wall.

Albert whipped a chock-like film off of his visor. The Spartan looked out of a window from an animal hotel he took refuge in. The radar on the bottom corner of his HUD showed there was a large movement across the street, in a building parallel to his position. He glanced at the ammo counter on the top right of his HUD, "5." Albert grabbed three eight gauge 3.5" magnum shells from his ammo bag that was strapped to his thigh.

He quickly loaded them into his pump action M90B Mk I tactical shotgun and said, "Time to go back to work." His radar flashed again, the large mass became bigger. "There are more of them now, regrouping," he said quietly to himself. Albert made it to the door, gripped the door handle tightly, and listened for Banshees and Wraiths or Ghosts. He quickly opening it and sprinted across the street with tremendous speed.

When the Spartan was only a few yards away from his destination, he saw a small squad of marines outnumbered in a firefight half way down the block. Albert saw a soldier point him and yell in gratitude, completely distracted from the Elite that emerged from behind the marine. The Elite shot the marine in the back in cold blood. Albert instantly flashed back to Armando's death from what he had just witnessed.

Stuck in that bloody memory that had haunted Albert for more than half of his life, he was distracted from realizing an Elite had spotted him and charged head on. The viscous Elite rushed with an energy sword wielded in one hand, and a plasma rifle in the other. Just before the Elite was close enough to strike, a three round burst penetrated its chest plate and fell to the ground at Albert's feet.

The Spartan quickly turned to see where the shots had come from. All he saw was a black figure in the distance. It stood up and started to approach Albert. The zoom in Albert's helmet allowed him to see it was an ODST, but didn't show a name indicator. When his masked savior got close, he raised an open hand and said, "What happened there Spartan?"

"I froze, I thought I saw someone." The ODST stood next to the Spartan, looked at the Elite and asked, "Who?" "An old friend who has

been gone for a long time. I'm the reason why he isn't with us." The ODSI removed his helmet and said, "Armando's death wasn't your fault." Albert was shocked to discover the soldier who saved him was Coppers.

"Sir, what are you doing here? I thought you were with Kerwood aboard the Liberty Bell." Coppers placed his boot on top of the Elite he shot down. "Would you rather be a dead hero, or a living coward? Besides, I was getting bored, decided to come down and say hi." He shoved the Elite with his boot, turning it over onto its back. The Elite rolled over, Albert and Coppers thought it was dead, but it wasn't. It gave a loud gurgle and activated two plasma grenades.

The Spartan quickly reacted by grabbing his mentor and throwing him over an overturned car across the street. The explosion tossed Albert through a window of a grocery store. The blast stunned and disoriented him. He gathered himself as he slowly stood up. When the dizziness went away, Albert realized he wasn't the only one in the store. Five angry Elites were staring right back at him, a sixth rose to its feet after being crouched over a dead butcher, and it barked in their alien tongue.

Albert watched as the Elites vanished into thin air. The cloaking devices the Elites possessed weren't fair in a fight, let alone six of them cloaked. Albert caught a slight glimpse of those Elites; they fit the description of Zealots. He looked up and shot the lights out to even the odds. The store went black; the Zealots weren't equipped with thermal or night vision optics, but luckily the Spartans were. In complete darkness, Albert silently maneuvered around the small group of Covenant assassins.

He waited till he was in the middle of the Elites, crouched behind the largest Zealot, which presumably was the leader, to carefully unsheathe his combat knife. When the Zealot flinched, Albert struck. The Zealot was dead before it hit the ground. Five plasma rifles turned and fired in the direction where the noises were created.

The bright flashes of Albert's shotgun illuminated the store. Two more Zealots hit the floor, dead. There were gaping holes in the center of their chests; their "perfect" armor didn't stand a chance against his custom high-powered pump action. The Spartan was like a ghost, he blended into the shadows, completely hidden and silent. The Elites were fighting a foe they couldn't see. It was true irony; finally the Covenant had a taste of their own medicine.

A glass jar fell from a shelf a few aisles away, shards scattered across the floor. The Zealots barked at each other, orders were exchanged. The smallest of the group was sent down that aisle to investigate. The Elite was very cautious as it made its way down the aisle. It spotted the glass on the floor, no human in sight.

The sun was starting to rise; light began to flow through the city. A small cloud of dust fell from above. The small Zealot looked up to see where it came from. There was a hole in the ceiling. It stood up straight, nearly eight feet tall, it was able to peak its head through the hole. Still unable to see, the Elite was unaware it was less than an inch from an eight gauge shotgun barrel that was pointed directly at him.

The last two remaining Zealots turned in the direction of a loud

crackle. They rushed to the other side of the store and rounded the corner of the aisle that the noise originated from, to find their comrade lying on the floor, headless. Brains, flesh, blood, and bones glazed the food and boxes on the shelves. One Zealot crouched to recover an energy sword his fallen comrade had holstered.

The two Elites scanned the area for their foe, nothing. Cutting through the air, a knife lodged itself into a throat of the standing Zealot. Gasping for air, the Elite fell back, squirming on the floor. The already crouched Elite rolled to hide behind a tall stack of canned goods. The dying Zealot reached out for help from his squad mate with a bloody hand.

Blobs of plasma shot through the air in hope to hit the illusive Spartan. The Elite overheated his rifle from firing continuously; he tried to vent the rifle. But his rifle melted shut, unable to fire. A bag of cornmeal tipped over, the Elite threw his unusable rifle in the direction where he thought he heard movement. The final Zealot quickly sprinted for the main door as he pulled the grip of his sword from its holster and activated it.

By retreating, the energy sword wielding Zealot thought by doing so he would draw out the human advisory, but he felt his leg tug on something. He began to hear ticking and see flashing red symbols he had never seen before appear on the entrance door.

"_**3â€|2â€|1â€|**_" The building shook violently, the front of the store erupted in flames, smoke and dust replace the clean air.

A shadowy figure emerged from the smoke and walked down the center aisle. It stopped and hovered over the severely wounded Elite on the floor. A hand reached down and gripped the handle of the knife, twisting and pulling. Cries of pain echo throughout the burning store. After freeing the knife, blood dripped from the knife. Albert flicked the knife to clean it a little.

The Elite spread its bloody, twitching mandibles wide open, struggling to speak. The Spartan aimed his shotgun at the mangled Elite. There was one last bright flash in the store, and then everything became quiet.

****Chapter 31****

0626 hours December 17th, 2540, Shadow Moses Police Department, Shadow Moses, Pallas Athena

The roof of the Police department had collapsed from motors, earthquakes and debris from the nuclear bomb that had detonated a few hours ago. Several marines, cops, civilians, a special team of ODSTs called "Fox 12," and a Spartan sheltered themselves while they planned their final attempt to change this battle. An ODST held a flashlight above a table everyone surrounded.

"What about here?" asked a Police Officer. With crossed arms, "No, that won't work. We'll be trading lives with zero reward," replied Albert. "He's right. We need to draw their focus to the center of the city," said Coppers from across the table. Arthur appeared onto a cracked view screen near the gathering.

"Hello everyone," said Arthur with a smile, "I have two suggestions, one being a complex version of Coppers' idea. By attracting the

Covenant forces to center of town, we can trigger EMP (Electro Magnetic Pulse) that could turn off anything electrical. Like ships, shields, and weapons. It will send those meanies back home." Coppers leaned over the table and asked, "Where would we acquire this EMP?"

The sound of Arthur's laughter shot out of the speakers, and then followed by, "There is a secret UNSC research facility 18.37 miles away. The scientists working there have been working on a prototype bomb that could only disrupt Covenant technology so much it surgically overloads, and shuts off." Coppers and Albert looked at each other for a few seconds and nodded.

"The second plan is to overload the reactors at the power plant to have meltdown and only destroy the city, killing everything. It would give us time to regroup in the forest; this plan will only buy us time. We would have to evacuate all civilians before proceeding with this plan."

Everyone was quiet, staring at Arthur with open eyes. A voice from the back of the group broke all silence. "I say we EMP their asses!" Heads turned to find the one who had spoken. Coppers and Albert saluted the man who chose the A.I.'s first plan. It was Captain Bishop. He started to walk closer to Coppers when he said, "Coppers? Last I heard you were with the Admiral."

Coppers noticed the Captain was injured while they shook hands. Blood collected on Snow's left side; he tried to hide it with his arm. "I thought you at the airfield with Lieutenant?" asked Albert. The Captain sat down at a chair near the table and sighed, "I ordered him to stay behind as I follow a truck full of marine reinforcements to aid in the battle here. But our truck was tipped over. We got rammed by a Wraith. Me and two others were the only ones that got out alive."

Chatter began to spread throughout the police station. Random people started to panic, "We lost!", "Let's run away!", "We can't win!", "Every man for themselves!" Albert raised a fist and slammed it onto the table, breaking it in half and shouted, "Hey! We have a war to fight here! We're the last chance this place has. If we get scared and run away, they'll find us one by one eventually. If you don't stand for something, you'll fall from something. Pull it together people, this is real!"

The Spartan's speech stopped everyone from saying anything more. The Captain struggled to stand, Coppers rushed to help him stand. "He's right, that's why we're going to do Arthur's EMP idea. We'll send those Covenant scum straight to hell!" barked Bishop. The room erupted in cheer. Arthur was jumped up and down clapped.

Coppers put his hand onto his earpiece, someone was relaying good news. "Okay, thanks. Over and out," he said. Arthur hummed to himself because he listened in on the quick conversation. Bishop looked over to Coppers, expecting him to fill everyone in on what he was just told. "Everyone listen up! The Liberty Bell was kind enough to send us a gift. A Shortsword class Bomber is on its way carrying the biggest bomb known to man, an H-bomb. It will be here 2100 hours. If we fail, they'll take care of it."

"Well we better get the job done first," said Albert. In the SMPD's

vehicle shop, everyone rushed to go to work welding, building, and preparing. Guns were passed around for cleaning, inspecting, and loaded. Vehicles had sheets of metal bolted and welded on, for the cost of more protection, speed was deducted. The assigned jobs were being finished right after another.

Things were winding down; Bishop's wounds were treated by the Spartan. The Captain stood onto a chair, "Everyone listen up! We've all knew this day would come since the war with the Covenant started. I know some of you might be scared, we all are. But this is our planet, and we're not going to run away!" His speech gave everyone hope, make them want to go fight, fight for their world back.

Bishop walked up to the lead Warthog and hopped into the driver's seat. "Coppers, I want you on the 50 cal., Albert, take Fox 12 into the center of town and set up camp. We'll be back with the EMP. Move out!" Coppers and the Captain took off down the street, and turned a corner to head to the UNSC research lab.

Albert has heard of Fox 12 before, mostly from rumors and war stories. Some of the field reports from Fox 12 weren't classified by ONI, so WOLF team had a green light to read up on their fellow soldiers. In the rumors, reports, and stories about Fox 12 all seemed a little exaggerated. How could twelve men without super human strength and speed perform similar black ops missions the Spartans do? The only two logical answers were either Fox 12 was another moral boost made for the public, or humanity actually has a fighting chance against their extermination.

The twelve men in the Special Forces team of ODSTs, Fox 12, lined up in formation behind Albert. Fox 12 were the best the ODSTs could offer; they were almost as deadly as Spartans. "Awaiting orders sir!" shouted the squad leader. The large Spartan turned to face his new, temporary pack. "Sir, I'm Sergeant Molodoi, what's our orders?" said the smallest of the group that was front and center. "What's your first name soldier?" The ODST was confused by the Spartan's question.

"Russell, sir." Albert grabbed the shotgun from his back and pumped it, kicking out a spent shell. "Need ammo sir?" Russell reached into his combat bag and pulled out a black box. Albert froze because he had seen that box before, 15 ½ years ago. "Kerwood said you'll need these." The ODST handed the Spartan the black box. Albert opened it and saw thirty-six eight gauge 4" magnum incendiary rounds.

Albert just recently heard about these rounds, and knew they were still top secret. But what bothered him was inside the box, there was only enough open space on the right side for two cigars. That means this technology was in the hands of insurrectionists that far back. He noticed something was engraved under the lid, "Comrades for life - Claude, _

_Harold, and William."___Albert closed the box and shoved it into his ammo bag.

"Alright Russell, let's move." Fox 12 followed their Spartan leader down a street and into a playground. They took their time passing through, scanning for hostiles. A thick layer of ash covered everything. There was something lying against the merry-go-round, it was spiky in shape. Albert came to a stop right behind a slide. Fox

12 mimicked him, scattering for cover.

The Sergeant crouched behind the Spartan and said, "What is it sir?" Albert kept his eyes on the object. "It looks like a trap. We stopped hearing footsteps and gun fire a few minutes ago." Russell nodded, "Ok sir. Foster, go check it out," he whispered. An ODSST from the far left moved slowly towards the merry-go-round with his rifle sighted on it. As solidier got closer, he heard moaning.

Foster was inches away when he started hearing, "Help me." It began to startle him. "Sir, it sounds like someone needs help." "Check it out, but keep your eyes open." Foster crouched and set his gun on the ground, then started to whip the dust off, hoping to find someone. Good news became a rarity since the invasion. He started to see an orange-metallic reflection. It was a child, he had blood on his clothes, but it seemed like it wasn't his.

Foster continued to pat the boy's clothes, "Its ok little guy, we're here to help." When the boy was almost completely dusted off, Foster saw a metal backpack strapped to the boy's back. He's seen it before, not on humans, but on Grunts. Foster started to slide his hand underneath the child to pick him up. The boy began to speak, "Don't touch the theâ€¦" but before the warning could be passed on to the ODSST, his hand ran across a trip wire.

There was a small ticking sound coming from the Covenant contraption that was strapped to the child's back. Foster turned and yelled, "It's a trap!" The ODSST started to stand up, the backpack stopped ticking. A dark red cloud replaced the sight of Foster and the young boy.

Bolts of plasma were being fired at Albert and Fox 12 from the streets and rooftops. The Spartan and ODSSTs had little no protection from the playground's jungle gym, slides, and see-saws. They tried fighting back, but it was no use. Out manned and out gunned, Albert was thinking of a plan to get him and his new squad out of this snag. "Russell! I need a smoke grenade!"

"You got it sir!" Russell rushed to search his team to find a smoke grenade. He turned to the soldier on his left, "You have a smoke grenade?" "No sir." "Damn!" Russell opened a channel with his team, "We need a smoke grenade! Who's got one?" After a long silence over the radio, someone finally responded. A soldier nicknamed "Mantis" answered, "I do sir! I'll bring it over to you."

"Ok, everyone cover him!" The Spartan and most of Fox 12 rose and returned fire. An ODSST on the other side of the playground stood up from behind a slide and ran towards Russell's position. On top of the roof of a motel across the street, a purple flash of light appeared and then was shot into the middle of the Covenant's ambush for the humans.

The ODSST fell to the ground a few meters from Fox 12's leader. "Man down!" screamed Russell as he hopped over his protective cover. Russell ran over and fell to his knees next to his downed soldier. As he turned Mantis over on to his back, Russell saw blood drip from a hole in the center of his cracked helmet.

Russell had to contain his anger from losing one of his team members. He grabbed the smoke grenade from Mantis' assault pack and ran back

towards cover. Covenant forces started advanced, soldiers from both sides started to fall. Albert watched Russell sit for a moment, taking in his team's casualties. The Sergeant began to become more and more frustrated. He stood up and threw the grenade at the center of the playground.

A massive cloud began to inflate from the tiny grenade. The Covenant ceased fire, because why shoot at an enemy you can't see. The leading Elite barked a few times as he engaged his energy sword. Every following Elite mimicked their leader and started to walk into the blinding smoke.

"They stopped firing!" someone cried out. "Quiet! That's what scares me," said Russell. "He's right. We need to move out, that was the point of the smoke. Everyone move to the building to our right! Follow me!" said Albert. The Spartan stood up and ran towards the building and the remaining of Fox 12 followed closely. A plasma mortar viciously hit the ground in between the Spartan and his team. Fox 12 responded with returned fire. Russell searched through dusty cloud the mortar had created. "Get everyone against that building's wall now!" yelled Albert over the squad's COMMs-channel. The Sergeant rounded up his team and made it to the building's wall. Albert punctured through the cloud at full speed. His shotgun slung over his back, and then braced himself.

Albert was able to knock a man sized hole in the wall. "Everyone inside!" ordered the Spartan. The ODSs rushed in and the Spartan was last one through the opening. Smoke covered over the hole in the wall everybody entered through, Fox 12 and Albert watched and waited with rifles aimed to see if Covenant would follow. No one said a word or made a noise.

There was a metal click in the back of the counter by the cash register. It was the safety to a magnum pistol. "Nobody move!" yelled a very skinny teenage boy in raggedy clothes. He looked to be no older than eighteen and appeared that he hasn't eaten well for a while, five o' clock shadow, and dirt all over his face. All of Fox 12 just stood as they watched the young boy start to shake from holding the large handgun he was aiming at them. Laughter erupted from the ODSs.

Behind the boy, a dark shadowy figure hovered over him. In the blink of an eye, the shadow quickly disarmed the boy and picked him up and held him down onto the counter. Russell stood next to the register, "Price check on isle two for one dumbass with a gun, I repeat, price check for one dumbass," he looked at two of his Corporals, "Cover that hole," then turned back to the boy, "Why are you aiming a gun at the men that are saving your planet?"

The young boy spat into Russell's face and yelled, "You're the reason why they're here!" Russell became infuriated and drew his combat knife and held it to the boy's throat. Before the ODS could go through with his revenge, a heavy set man in outdated fatigues walked out from the back room and raised his voice, "Enough! Please stop!"

****Chapter 32****

0709 hrs December 17th, 2540, Bravo-9 Research Facility, 5 miles outside of Shadow Moses, Pallas Athena

Eighteen miles, at the Research Facility, Bishop and Coppers had little to no trouble finding the place, but breaking inside will be a different story. When a global evacuation was ordered, the civilian and military workers of the lab wanted to do their part and get back at the Covenant for the invasion. Booby-traps were set up for any nosey Covenant.

Coppers stepped out of the Warthog; a glimmer of light from the moon brought his attention to a trip wire a few feet to his right. It stretched across the full width of the main entrance of the front gate. They climbed over the front gate without triggering the trap and made it over to the only building with more than one story. They both stood at the ready on each side of a side door as they put on their NVD GEN VIII (Night Vision Device Generation VIII). Bishop whispered, "It's locked. Breach and clear?"

Coppers answered his question by pulling out the charges and began to set them up. The white-doughy C7 plastic explosives outlined the metal door. Coppers flipped a switch on a small remote device. The C7 transitioned from a pasty-white to a violent red. The thick metal door slowly fell backwards into the building. They both rushed in, rifles up, scanning for hostiles. No threats detected, so far.

"Arthur, where do we need to go from here?" asked Bishop. Coppers checked his wrist watch, `_**07:16**_`, concerned about the small window of time to find their objective. There was a desk a few feet from Coppers, he walked over and went through all the drawers, hoping to find a map. Arthur took a moment to respond, "Sorry Captain, my services were needed elsewhere. You want to find a communications terminal and turn it on for me please. The backup generator isn't responding, so I'm going to reroute power from the city's grid to the facility." Bishop looked around to find a terminal.

Lights began to flicker from several devices and in all directions. There was a large, black computer the size of a desk in the corner to their right that was flashing red. Bishop walked over to it, a sign above it said "Communications." He asked, "This one Arthur?" Through the security cameras that now have power, Arthur was able to watch Coppers and Bishop. But Arthur wasn't equipped with the proper clearance to access the mainframe of the entire complex.

"Yes sir. Sign in with `'_ONI-393_'` and the password is `'_Lu Le La Le Lo,_'` once you do that, I'll be able to gain control of the place," said the child-like A.I. After a moment spent typing, Bishop handed over the controls to Arthur, "I'm in the system. You want to get on the service elevator a few feet to your right and go to Basement 2. The EMP bomb is still intact and operational."

The two soldiers made their way onto the elevator. They both looked at each other when Coppers pressed the button to go down. It only took a few seconds to drop a couple hundred meters underground. Coppers glanced at his watch, `_**07:27**_`. The temperature dropped severely by the time they reached the second level of the basement. When the doors opened, a gurney met them by blocking their way. Bishop pushed it off to the side as they entered the hallway.

There was a sign on the wall with an arrow pointing down the hall saying "Bay 3 â€" Experimental Research." They ran down the hall and

stopped at the first door they encountered. "This Door Arthur?" asked Coppers. Bishop put his hand on the doorknob and turned it the second he heard Arthur answer with "Yes sir." They both walked in as a spot light illuminated the man-sized EMP bomb on a table with cables and wires connected to it.

Arthur appeared through this compound's A.I.'s projector in the room next to a computer. "I'll detach all the connections. But it weighs a lot and by judging your strength patterns, you two can't lift it," said Arthur. "How are we going to get it out of here then?" asked Bishop. Arthur put his hands into his pockets and began to whistle. Coppers stood by the door while he was thinking of an idea. He spotted a mini crane next to four oxygen tanks, alongside the far wall that was used to transport the bomb.

Coppers walked up to the EMP bomb and inspected it, "I have an idea." He laughed under his breath. Arthur crossed his legs and sat down, floating a few inches above his podium, appearing interested into what the idea was. "You see the crane there," Coppers pointed at it, "we can use that to lift the bomb and remember that gurney we found earlier? We can use oxygen tanks to weld the frame to reinforce it so we can haul it out of here."

Arthur was fascinated by the ingenious plan the Coppers had devised so quickly. Bishop nodded and left the room in agreement to retrieve the gurney. Coppers looked at watch, `**07:33**`, as he turned the valves to the tanks to ignite the torch.

`**Chapter 33**`

0710 hrs December 17th, 2540, Busch's Market & Deli, Shadow Moses, Pallas Athena

Two more men came running from the back room with rifles, assumedly the obese man's personal guard. "Please don't harm my son," the heavy man turned to his men standing behind him, "put those things away!" Albert held out his right hand, signaling Fox 12 to lower their weapons. He walked closer to Albert and stared into his dirt covered visor. "He is young and foolish, he doesn't know any better."

Albert zoomed in on to the old man's nametape on his fatigues, "`_Animus_`." He's heard of this name before, fifteen years ago. The Spartans were taught everything about their enemies, both Insurrectionists and Covenant alike. But when the name "Colonel Claude Gaujot Animus" came up in their studies, there was tension in the air.

Apparently in November of 2522, according to records, a month after Colonel Animus received his promotion; he was in charge of a freighter-class frigate called "`_Lincoln's Pride_`," in which was transporting ammunition, uniforms, battle armor, tanks, food, etc. from Earth to Reach. Captain Coppers and Major Kerwood assisted the Colonel in the trip. But something went terribly wrong. When they were half way to their destination, the `_Lincoln's Pride_` unexpectedly came out of slipspace.

The emergency lights and sirens came on almost immediately, waking everyone who weren't in cryosleep. The massive freighter shook violently and explosive sounds all came from smaller ships connecting to the `_Lincoln_`. Operators and soldiers scrambled to their battle

stations. Gun fire and screams of dying men and women echoed down hallways. Rebel Insurrectionists were hijacking the ship. Coppers was putting on his uniform when he looked up and saw an extremely tall man in civilian clothing with an assault rifle standing in the doorway to his room.

Before the tall civilian aimed his rifle at Coppers' center mass, a muzzle of a magnum pistol was pressed onto the back of the tall man's head. Blood and brains splattered onto the empty bookshelf on the wall. The rebel dropped instantly to the floor with the top of his head missing. Moments later, Coppers and Kerwood made their way to the control room and found Animus working at the main terminal. Animus claimed he was "sending out an SOS and requested immediate assistance." He actually crashed the communications server.

When the gun fire drew closer and closer, all three of them made their way to an escape pod. With Coppers and Kerwood both unaware of Animus' actions and intentions, they were the first ones inside the pod and begun to disengage it from the ship. Animus slowly entered as he watched the other two at work. Just a few feet away, several rebels began to line up at the doorway to the pod.

Animus gave his farewells to his faithful comrades he has known since birth, knowing he probably won't see them again after his betrayal and walked out of the pod. He pulled the manual eject lever in the doorway and watched Coppers and Kerwood shoot out into space. Those events encouraged Coppers to join the ODSTs to become a better fighter and Kerwood to become a better leader by commanding highly decorated battle ships. All the debriefings from the few survivors were altered for the public, but only bits and pieces of the truth were given to the Spartans for studies. From that point on, Colonel Animus, an accomplished and well respected commander was known as the Rebel leader.

The Spartan turned and caught his Sergeant's eye, "Release him." Russell snorted in anger and let go of the young boy, "You got lucky kid. I'm not done with you." The teenager fell off the counter and ran to his father. The large man had a grey beard, blading, and battle scares all over his face. He grabbed his son's shoulder tight, "Do you want to get yourself killed? They were nice enough not to shoot you." "I'm sorry dad," the young boy dropped his head in shame, "I wanted to make you proud."

Russell sheathed his combat knife and checked his suppressed M7S submachine gun, "And who might you be grandpa?" The heavy old man pulled a patrol cap from his back pocket and put it on. The insignia on the cap confirmed Albert's theory. The bearded old man exhaled slowly and said, "My name is," Albert quickly interrupted him, "Colonel Animus." The rebel leader seemed surprised the Spartan knew who he was, "You've heard of me?"

"You're betrayal is well known in the inner colonies and it's compared to Benedict Arnold's betrayal against America. The deaths of thousands were blamed on you," Albert replied. Russell clenched his fists, "What a minute, you're Colonel Animus? My father was killed on the hijacking of the Lincoln's Pride." After hearing what Albert said, Animus' face seemed lifeless for a second. Russell shouldered his M7S and took a few step towards Animus. "Sergeant, stand down," said the Spartan with leadership. Russell froze, but still was intent with killing his father's murderer.

Animus took a deep breath, "Typical ONI, they didn't release the truth to the public." Russell had a confused look on his face, "You better start talking old man." The former Colonel of the UNSC turned to his guards, "Go take my boy back underground." The two Insurrectionists and the young boy walked to the back room where they had come from. When the room was only filled by UNSC's finest, the second worst betrayer in history began to tell his story.

"Twenty-two years ago, I was ordered by ONI to come in contact with the rebels and earn their trust. Then four years later, on November 11th, 2522, 0901 hours, the morning before departure to Reach, I was given a mission directly from the head director of ONI. I was an undercover agent, exposing all of their secret plans and locations. But one day, ONI decided to cut the cord on the operation of five years without telling me." Albert glanced at the barricade that covered the hole in the wall Fox 12 built a few moments ago, and then turned back, "How did you find out that ONI disbanded your assignment?"

"Well I guessing ONI didn't want me alive and knowing their secrets because they sent a couple assassins after me, but obviously I'm still here." Russell looked at Albert in outrage, "And we're going to believe this atrocious story? He's clearly lying!" The Spartan's attention was drawn away from his furious ODS and stared at the walls. With Albert's acute hearing from the augmentations and the added help from his helmet, he was able to hear footsteps all around the building.

"Sir, we have one of the UNSC's most wanted right here in front of us!" yelled Russell. Albert said nothing, still didn't acknowledge Russell. The rest of Fox 12 watched the Spartan as they began doubt his ability to be their leader. "I'm taking charge now!" said Russell in a deep-raspy tone. The Spartan quickly turned to face his Sergeant, "Quiet! We have company outside. Alpha formâ€¦" suddenly a plasma mortar stopped Albert in midsentence as it crashed into the roof.

Everyone inside was temporarily deafened from the sound of the concussive explosion from the impact. Blue and purple smoke and dust filled the building. Most of Fox 12 was covered by rubble and debris from the ceiling and unable to free themselves, some were unconscious. The lucky few, who weren't trapped or knocked out returned fire through the main entrance and windows.

Sometime had passed when Russell opened his eyes to a splitting headache, ears ringing, and completely dazed. Blood dripped down his face as he reached out to grab his helmet, when he put it on, the visor was cracked. As he slowly rose to his knees, he saw one of his ODSs pinned down behind an aisle a few yards away shooting back at the Covenant ambush. Russell couldn't hear the shots being fired. He looked up through the massive hole in the roof and saw a swarm of Covenant drop ships and seraph fighters begin to mask the sunrise. His severe disorientation made him seem like a drunk when he tried to stand up.

When he got to his feet, he noticed his beloved M7S wasn't in his possession. The ODS ran across the aisle to get to Russell. That soldier was Russell's Corporal, Corporal Riley. When Riley tried to

give Russell a sit-rep (Situation Report), he couldn't understand him. The Corporal's voice was muffled in Russell's ears. "What?" screamed Russell. As the Corporal tried to speak louder, Russell took his helmet off to check his ears, there was blood.

In the distance, Russell saw an Elite over the Corporal's shoulder charge them. Russell crouched and pulled Riley's M6C/SOCOM pistol and fired five 12.7x40mm rounds into the red reflective armor. Several splashes of purple blood misted from the entry and exit points of the threat that approached them. Just after the Elite hit the ground, Russell felt a brush of air hit him from his side. He looked over and saw an energy sword materialize out of thin air. Before Russell or Riley could react, a kukri knife found its target in the neck of the Elite who just revealed himself. It fell to the ground limp and started to squirm.

Through the smoke, Albert ran up to the twitching dead body, pulled the knife out and immediately threw it at another approaching Elite. Russell and Riley watched as Albert charged the Elite that was hit in the ribs by his knife. The Spartan tackled the blue armored Elite. He then grabbed the knife, pushed it in deeper and twisted. Russell stood up and ran over to the screaming alien; put his pistol into its four-mandible jaw. The Elite clamped down onto the barrel just before he pulled the trigger. Blood, bone, and brains poured out of the back of the Elite's head.

Albert pulled out his knife, sheathed it as he and Russell nodded at each other. Showing they were back on the same page with each other. Bloody cries for help brought Albert's attention to Riley. Russell quickly turned to see what Albert was looking at. A Jackal pinned Riley to the floor, and then began to tear him to shreds. But before the sneaky Jackal could confirm the kill, its bird-like head exploded, purple blood painted Riley's armor and BDUs. The headless body dropped onto ODST.

Russell ran to his Corporal's aid. Albert looked to his right and saw Animus standing about a dozen meters away, holding a large antique Smith&Wesson revolver. A shot at that distance and trying to hit a rapidly moving target was near impossible, let alone with a massive hand cannon like that. The end of Animus' revolver expelled white smoke as he opened its cylinder, emptying its chambers. Massive spent shells hit the ground with a loud clanking sound as he swiftly reloaded fresh golden 500 magnum rounds one by one.

Albert took cover behind some rubble as a transmission came in, "Bishop to Wolf 021, come in." The sound of a chain gun crackled in the background. "This is Wolf-021, go ahead," answered Albert. "Arthur said we're five minutes out from your position. What's your situation like?" "We have injured and some possibly K.I.A. There are about twenty Covvies inside our position and maybe twenty more outside."

Albert heard more gun fire and Coppers' voice over the radio. "Step on it Bishop! We got Banshees!" As Bishop and Coppers were a few blocks away from Fox 12's position, two Banshees dropped down from the sky. Just before they could open fire on the Warthog, a third joined their formation and shot down the two leading Banshees. A familiar voice came over the radio, "Got 'em Captain. You and your ODST gunner are clear now." It was Andrew. He has been taking down several swarms of Banshees by pretending to be one of them.

"Hey Andrew, I can't reach Michael. How's he doing?" Albert asked, a little curious on how much fun he was having. "Michael has his hands full. He's on top of a factory doing a lot of target practice." "Well I hope you're having fun too. My day has been ok." Coppers' voice loudly alerted Andrew, "You have five bogies on you tail! Evade!" There was a camera on the stern fin of the Banshee, which acted as a rear view mirror. Andrew checked a view screen and saw the five Banshees on an attack trajectory for him. "Coppers? Is that you?" asked Andrew as he pulled up to avoid a skyscraper.

"Yeah it's me. I decided to join the party." Bishop rounded the last corner to get to Albert and Fox 12. He stepped on the gas as he ran over a hand full of Jackals and an Elite who seemed to be the squad leader. The Warthog came to a stop right in front of the store. "We're here, get down!" Coppers rotated the long barreled 50 cal. turret and aimed it into the store's entrance. Albert swiftly got up and ran to Russell. As he heard the machinegun's triple-barrel began to spin, Albert got to him and held him down to the ground. "Hit the deck!" yelled Albert to the rest of the team over the squad's channel.

Everyone still fighting laid down as bullets flew through the air, tearing into the Covenant invaders. Coppers swung the machinegun from left to right a few times. After a couple minutes of cover fire, the steam from the overheating machinegun let Coppers know it was time to stop. Bishop quickly stepped out of the Warthog's driver's seat with the butt stock of his rifle pressed into his shoulder. Coppers jumped off from the back of the jeep-like vehicle and mimicked Bishop.

Coppers and Bishop walked into the store, scanning for any foreign survivors. They noticed some of the Elites that didn't get chopped into pieces were cut in half and some were still alive. One in particular was trying to put its intestines back into its torso. A foul smell flooded the air. Several Grunts exploded upon contact from the large caliber bullets puncturing their methane tanks.

As they walked over the slush left over from the dead bodies, Coppers and Bishop saw their black armored Spartan stand up with a layer of dust on him. "You have a smug on your uniform, soldier," Coppers said jokingly. You couldn't see Albert's eyes through the gold visor of his helmet, but you could tell his was glaring at Coppers. Albert dusted himself off and said, "It's hard to stay pretty when you're actually doing real work." That retort gave Coppers a smile. Bishop walked over to help Russell up from the rubble and saw Riley. "He's barely stable!" Russell turned to face some of his ODSTs who began to stand back up, "Medic!"

"We have a Med-kit in the Warthog." Bishop stopped talking because he noticed the blood dripping down from Russell's ears. "Coppers look," he pointed to Russell's ears, "he's deaf." Bishop gestured Russell to sit down. "Coppers, call in for medic," Bishop asked. Coppers felt Albert's heavy footsteps when he ran to the Warthog for the kit.

When Albert got to the Warthog, he saw the EMP bomb on top of the roll cage and tied down to the only center bar. He grabbed the Med-kit and rushed back to Russell and Riley. The medic Coppers called over was already attending Riley. Albert handed him the

kit.

Bishop looked to his left and saw a large, bearded old man in outdated fatigues help unearth the ODSs from the rubble. When the old man saw Bishop, he got up and walked towards him. "We have three dead and three injured." There was a moment in silence for the lost men. "Damn!" Bishop sighed "How many are left of Fox 12 that can still fight?" "Counting Russell, five."

Coppers looked over to see who Bishop was talking to. As he looked at the old man, he seemed familiar. Coppers tried to place where he knew him from, but as soon as he heard him speak, he knew who the Santa Clause lookalike was.

"Animus!" growled Coppers. He began to charge the old man a few meters away. Albert quickly grabbed and held him back. "You backstabbing son of a bitch!" Bishop stood in front of Animus and said, "Easy Coppers, easy!" The Spartan didn't have any trouble holding Coppers in place. "You know what he is Bishop! Kill that bastard!" The old man walked by Bishop to look Coppers in the eyes. "Harold Coppers, my old friend. I'm sorry for what I have done to you and William. ONI never told you the truth did they?"

"What truth? That you're a lying traitor!" said Coppers with a rasp in his voice. Animus lowered his head and exhaled, "No, I was put undercover by ONI to expose the Insurrectionist. It was so nice of them to never reveal the truth and try to kill me." Coppers began to stop resisting Albert's grip on his armor strap. "I've hated myself for doing that to you and William for almost three decades." Coppers shook himself free from the Spartan and walked outside to the Warthog and kicked its tire.

Bishop tapped Animus on the shoulder. "Please go help cover the dead." "Yes Captain." When Animus finally was far enough to where he couldn't hear Bishop and Albert, the two began to talk. "Do you believe him, Albert?" "I'm not sure, sir." Bishop began to walk outside, "I'll talk to Coppers. I want you to round up the rest of Fox 12." Albert stood next to Russell and Riley. "What the hell just happened?" asked Russell.

End
file.